Major Dane's Garden

M. F. Perham

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BY

M. F. PERHAM

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To
MY SISTER

FOREWORD

I have written a story and chosen a part of the Empire for its setting. Although the background is real, the characters are entirely fictitious. There is no living person in this book. The events, also, are fictitious, and the questions of policy, except where they are such as arise in all coloured dependencies.

M. F .P.

Major Dane's Garden

I

A SINGLE vulture hung in the air above Berbera. From its height the world lay in two halves of colour, one blue, one maize-coloured, sea and desert. They were divided by a wandering white thread that was made by the foam of the waves. At one point where these two immensities of colour lay together there was a blotching and speckling, as if a handful of refuse, green, brown and white, had been dropped from the sky upon two hundred miles of emptiness.

This was Berbera, and, to the vulture, dropping lower, the town assumed form and interest. Seen through his horny-lidded eyes, the green became the green of trees where all day long the carrion crows ambled upon the branches in hideous conference. The browns were a patchwork of native huts: the tangle of paths amongst them was the hunting-ground of pariah-dogs and shrunken, scabrous cats. The white was the white of walls and mosques and Arab houses, returning the sun glare for glare, and beyond them on the shore, hawks and fish-eagles strolled about, picking over the tidal scum. But the arch-scavenger turned his head to where the desert crept up behind the tattered huts, to the place of bones, where the sheep and camels were slaughtered, and where at night the hyenas came to lick the stained sand, and the jackals yapped and pattered amongst the garbage.

There was one place which held no promise to the vulture. A mile or less up the shore from the native town a high white wall girdled a thousand trees, crowding them in its embrace as if it clasped them from the desert. There were date-palms and mimosa-thorns, myrrh, hibiscus, oleander, and, like dice

on green velvet, lay the squares and rectangles of the houses. This was the European quarter.

It was early afternoon and a man, entering by the little archway in the wall and passing the sentry into the open space that lay amongst the houses, would have found a stillness as if this had been a place of tombs rather than the headquarters of a British Protectorate. There were a dozen houses, so white that he would have thanked God for the foliage that broke their stare a little.

Yet, in this heat-numbed enclosure, there was taking place an activity of great importance. The Governor's house faced the sea : from the arched veranda, terraces, choked with flowering shrubs, dropped to the wall. The great room giving upon the veranda was empty ; so was the dining-room, and all the upper floor. The servants slept in the shadow of the cook-house. But in a small, square room, built on at the back with careful calculation as to heat and sand-storm, two voices were imprisoned. Through an hour and a half, while Berbera slept, with hardly a break the murmuring went on.

Here was the Governor about to depart in the little grey tramp blistering off the shore : opposite him was his successor, whom it had just disembarked.

" Well ! " the Governor, was saying, " I don't think there is anything else. I've dealt with most of the outstanding points. It is just as well not to say too much. I don't want you to inherit any of my prejudices. And the problems in a place like this remain pretty much the same from year to year. It all depends upon what general principles you deal with them."

" About this disarmament—I'm not sure that I altogether agree . . . "

" I don't expect you do." The Governor stared at his fist, deeply considering what he should say. The drone of two electric fans filled the silence.

The Governor looked a strong man. Hair, once red, clustered round his square face in tiny, grizzled curls. He sat very still at his desk, keeping his eyes mostly upon his successor. Tempering a powerful voice, he spoke with care, bringing his vowel sounds out with a strength so unusual in Englishmen of his world that it was often said that he had the accent of the North country.

Sir John Chard, for all his look of strength, was beyond his physical prime. Lionel Page was in the early forties, having obtained a governorship at an unusually early age. Looking across at him, searching, testing, Chard had little to go upon.

He saw a man, just over middle height, sitting in the long teak chair with something of a sprawl, and smoking a series of cigarettes. His face was narrow and well-shaped; a small, black, military moustache smudged the line of the mouth. He seldom did more than flash a glance across Chard's steady gaze, his eyes being more concerned with his cigarette and the shape of the smoke rising from it. Chard knew that the other was listening intently, but giving back nothing, neither agreement nor friendliness. The older man, as he talked, tried to see the other with the eyes of those who had chosen him for this difficult work. "Intelligent," he thought, "No doubt of that. A thruster. Writes good reports, I guess, and talks well when he wants to talk." Then, seeing how Page continually shifted in his chair and how his lips kept moving except when drawn deliberately against his teeth, he thought, "Restless. Unsure. Absurd to be on the defensive with me." Aloud, he said,

"You want me to talk about disarmament. It sounds well in Downing Street. Out here we see things differently. It's this way, Page. There's a limit to logic in a Protectorate. In the West we worship efficiency; the East has no use for it; doesn't even know how to translate the word. After all, efficiency is a means, not an end. I'm not sure that General Travers didn't govern this country better on the back of an old envelope than we with our typewriters and everlasting reports and secretaries of secretaries of secretaries. We're a Protectorate, and there's a point where we change in kind and not in degree if we follow up this efficiency trail any further. I'm not sure we haven't passed it already. With regard to disarmament—we didn't come here to organise a system, but to oversee the working of theirs. If you want to make this into a Crown Colony, make it so, but do it with your eyes open!"

"Oh, quite, quite," murmured Page.

"Disarm the tribes! Sounds well! But how are you going to keep them disarmed? How are you going to stop the leakage on the frontier from the French? Bound to have trouble there; they've got gun-running in the blood—sold cannon to the infidel from the time of Suleyman the Magnificent. How stop the overflow from Abyssinia? More than two million rifles there, you know, Page. Add to the Police? Add to the troops—the Mounted Rifles? No good beginning it unless you are prepared to go right through with it. It's my opinion that you couldn't disarm without three battalions of rifles instead of three companies. That gives the tribes what they've

never had yet and it's our business not to give them—a common grievance.

"And who are the people you'd be able to disarm? The peaceful tribes near the coast—the friendlies inland. Who are the last people you'd disarm? The border tribes we've hardly begun to touch—the bands of 'barat'—the robbers—Derea Waraba and his raiders. You'd never disarm them. They'd slip over the frontier into the Ogaden country and laugh in their sleeves until you'd got tired of waiting for them, and then they'd be over again, playing the deuce with your defenceless friendlies."

"Oh, it's a big step——"

"It's not a step. Don't deceive yourself, Page. It's a new policy. They don't understand that at the C.O. Call it a step; send in a cheap estimate, and they'll start blindfold on a policy that'll lead God knows where! It'll mean military occupation of this country until the tax-payer spots the item and then there will be another evacuation. It won't be called that, of course. We've got plenty of euphemisms for the Press and the people who make themselves unpleasant at question-time."

"Granting all this," began Page, "the alternative——"

"Is not so despicable as some people think." Chard checked the strong feeling that had been deepening his voice. "In cold print the position sounds absurd. Five vast districts and five helpless commissioners among an armed, treacherous and truculent people.

"But the truth is that there is no challenge in the lone commissioner; he doesn't provoke hostility unless he makes mistakes. (I grant you we want picked men). It's the troops who cause the trouble. Ask any man in the administration if he'd rather be alone with the risk of assassination than have a company of the Rifles camped in the station. I know that I'm not a soldier and that you are. But this is more than the old civil versus military feud. It's because the Somal is a warrior and troops rouse him; they don't cow him. He reckons he's as good a man as we are and so far we haven't been able to destroy that belief."

"And you honestly think it is possible to run a native country where that conviction still holds good?" The question was asked in a wholly neutral voice: there was no hint of opinion in it. "Of course, it's an entirely new idea."

"It *was*," said Chard. "Aren't we trying to find our way to a new conception of imperial responsibility? But that is neither here nor there. It is Somaliland we are discussing. You'll find your work cut out, if you want to impress the Somal.

I tell you I've learned to respect the beggar. He's got a pretty adequate tribal system and if there's still a goodish bit of raiding now and then—well, it's a Garden of Eden to what it used to be, and at mighty little cost to the British tax-payer."

"Then if you'd been doing another term——"

Chard thought his successor's deliberate refusal to complete his sentences rather ridiculous, but he was concerned with policies not personalities and he constructed his reply carefully.

"Had I been coming back, I should have carried my old policy a step further. That is, instead of trying to seize rifles I should have gone on trying to cultivate the loyalty of the riflemen. There's no short cut to success here. It's a matter of increasing your hold over the tribes by patient spade-work, gradually spreading your influence inland from the coast. We've reached the Habr Awwal now and are working upon the Gadabursi away round Hargeisa. I should have concentrated with the help of the tribes upon the extirpation of Derea Waraba and his dervishes, and I should have done all I could to further the very important experiments that Major Dane is making at Hargeisa. I won't talk about them. You'll doubtless go to Hargeisa and then you will see for yourself. I am not sure you won't find there the key to the whole problem of this country."

"Indeed! That's very interesting," said Page.

What was he thinking? Chard, like many others in the next six months, wondered and would not have been wholly enlightened if he could have watched the distinct groups of thoughts, wandering round the other's mind, crossing, rising, sinking, like fish in a bowl.

One part of his mind listened with intentness and respect. Each of the slow emphatic words was of interest, the word of a governor, of a man about to return to the Colonial Office. With his intelligence, therefore, he listened. With his pride he chafed. He had come, after hard striving, to honour and opportunity; here on the threshold he must meet with anti-climax; must listen and bow his head to this Polonious-talk. He must endure to be a nobody, a new-comer for as many long hours as this man cared to keep him out of his kingdom.

His ambition also chafed. To say that he had his policy prepared would not be true; he meant to feel his way, but there was that in his character which predetermined his road: it was not that trodden by the older man. "He is old," he thought, "he has played for caution; his régime has been barren; he wants to frighten me at the start into the same sterility. They

will give him a good job now, a decorative job, but the chance for constructive work is over. He's missed his big chance, and he knows it. That's what lies behind his swan-song. But we are not all frightened of efficiency and logic, and there are some of us who can turn a small job into a big opportunity."

"I meant to keep away from personalities," Sir John said, "but there is just this to say. I understand you know Colonel Cavell. Didn't he tell me you were at school with him? Now, Cavell and I have not always seen things from the same angle, but as a soldier I think he is a man of promise and distinction. I am telling you this because I want the best for him and the Rifles. Cavell's been loosening rein this last year or so. I've watched him, as a governor does watch a man on whom at a given moment everything may depend. It was very good news to me when I heard that he got married on his last leave, though there was no question then of his bringing his wife out. But when he came back, there wasn't much difference. Understand me, Page, there's nothing critical about this. Cavell's got a head on his shouiders, and he thinks, like many lesser men, that he knows just how much rope he can give himself. You mayn't see much difference. I see just that between the perfect M.R. of his old dreams and a pretty adequate Corps. For Mrs. Cavell—obviously there's more difference for her." Chard waited, but the other refused to comment. "I suggested that Mrs. Cavell should be allowed to come out. I know something about her. It means we allow a woman into the interior as far as Burao, but things are pretty quiet now, and the safest place in the country should be with the Rifles. If——" he chose his words with more than usual care. "If you should modify your policy, you will not do it in a day, and there will be time to make provision for her. A woman like Mrs. Cavell won't do any harm out here."

"I've not met her, but I believe she's quite charming," said Page.

"Anyhow, she's to come. I've told Cavell."

"I quite understand," said Page, who could not yet see how this last move on Chard's part would affect him.

There was a rustle and the governor's boy stood in the doorway, his expressionless face on a form, still and straight in its kansu as a white column.

"Haji Aden Mahomed. He say, salaam, Sahib."

"Put him on the veranda, Yusuf; I'll be there soon. Give him a cup of tea while he's waiting."

He spoke in Somali, but Page caught enough words to give

him the meaning, and made a mental note of the way in which natives were treated at Government House.

"Haji Aden is one of the most important men in the country. I expect you have heard of him. He succeeded his father as chief of the Habr Awwal, and under Dane's influence has become something like a native adviser to the Government. He's one of the strongest cards we have in our hands. Dane thinks he's loyal and he's a pretty good judge. It's very unusual for the Somal to salute the setting sun. You noticed how many chiefs there were upon the landing-stage when you arrived. Count the number when I go to-morrow. You won't have much trouble. You see, they know I'm not coming back."

"Does it hurt at all?" asked Page, unable to guess from the other's manner.

Chard rose and walked up and down. Then he sat upon the desk, looking down upon Page, still intent upon examining him.

"Yes and no," he replied, "I think, Page, if one is anything human, anything between a beast and a god, its bound to prick. But I am old enough to have earned a sense of proportion, and with all his faults, I like the Somal. He's like no other native on earth. There's no formula for handling him. Coming from India, after two years' blundering, I had to unlearn everything I knew. You'll have to do the same. He's treacherous, hysterical, truculent, vain, avaricious. But he's a warrior and a stoic, and he's the cleanest native I ever struck. Call his hysteria temperament, his truculence courage, and his vanity a proper pride, and you see him in a new light. He's got dignity, he's got intelligence. He's good to look upon. But, best of all, he's an eternal surprise. This race can produce individuals fit to rank with any, and examples of faithfulness, and—yes—of love, that would go into history text-books in Europe."

Page's opinion of the Governor dropped several degrees lower during this speech.

"That's very interesting," he said. "It's not often one hears a good word said for the Somal."

"I know," said Chard. "I've been *advocatus diaboli* for many years. They grow upon you. You know, Page, it's not only the people, it's the place. You hate it like hell when you first come, and there's only one thing you can think of on your first trip and that is how soon you can get a transfer. But——" He stopped. Chard was no talker. In this interview both men had belied their natures. Chard had talked deliberately,

because it was not a moment to cherish, like Page, personal treasures, pride, dignity, reserve. There were things he felt about the country that, secret though they were, he would have revealed for the country's sake, had he not caught a look in the other man's eyes. "He won't take it from me. He's got to find out for himself," he thought, and he stepped to the doorway and looked towards the sea, while the unspoken thoughts gathered in his mind.

"This country will put him through it. You can't bluff it. It finds out the weak places, body and spirit. It's ugly and cruel. It produces nothing, gives nothing, but it takes all the best you've got in you. It isn't possible to succeed here, but it is possible to fail. You hate it all the time you're here, and you curse it and fight with it, and when you leave it you spend the rest of your life breaking your heart to get back to it."

II

It is simple, if not quite accurate, to think of Somaliland as being roughly triangular in shape, pointing south, the base formed by the coast, which lies to the north. It is divided for administrative purposes into five large districts. Three of these have their head-quarters on the coast, Zeila near the western frontier; Berbera forty miles east of Zeila, and Las Khorai sixty miles east of Berbera. Behind them a fourth district centres round Burao, and in the apex of the triangle, but rather to the East, is Hargeisa, whose borders march with Abyssinia. This was the district under the care of Major Dane. The three companies of the Rifles were divided, two being at Burao with the colonel, and one at Berbera.

During the few weeks following Sir Lionel's installation, there was tension in Somaliland. The commissioners, in their lonely districts, went about their duties wondering, aware that the natives around them were equally alert. According to their views of Chard's policy, they hoped or feared. In Berbera itself the officials, soldiers, policemen and one wife—not more than a dozen in all—trod delicately.

None of them guessed how much thinking the Governor did in those first weeks. Yet there were no two opinions in Berbera about the Governor's brains; silent or talkative, he gave the impression of being a clever man. There was a forcefulness about him, but it was not like Chard's strength, borne unconsciously as his clothes; it was something carried carefully and often hidden like a weapon kept for some important occasion. It was this that made the whole man mysterious, and spread a vague discomfort about him in social intercourse. The Principal Medical Officer said;

"It is as if we were a lot of silly puppy-dogs with whom, for reasons of his own, he had decided to play. I can't quite make out yet what sort of a beast he is, but he takes very elaborate care not to show his teeth or claws."

At which Blaker, the young man who was his confidant, laughed rather bitterly, and said, "I don't know what sort of creature he *is*, but I'm pretty sure what he means to be—a lion."

Blaker was not wrong. Page was highly ambitious, but he did not mean to let his ambition make a fool of him. He had worked hard for his appointment, talked for it, written for it, and had impressed the right people, until they had admitted that he was a remarkable man. He had the capacity for going straight to the elements of the question, stripping it of all that was not vital, which made him effective both in word and on paper. Added to this was an active imagination, which made his reports vivid as well as clear.

He had little doubt that he would be able to surprise those who thought his appointment was a speculation. His restlessness came from no lack of self-confidence; only from impatience for the chance to prove himself. Was he to accept his predecessor's humble conception of his scope, and spend all his energies in preserving a precarious and inglorious *status quo?* That was the safe policy, so safe that he might reckon upon growing grey in its fulfilment. Was there not another policy? Already, dimly, he conceived it. He was aware that it fascinated and that in fascination lay danger. He must keep his judgment in the ascendency. Every detail must be considered; every human instrument scrutinised; every opinion gathered.

It will be understood that the Secretary had an unhappy time. He was one of those men who cultivate a well-bred, boisterousness of manner, which makes them a godsend at a chilly dinner-party. He had a telling laugh, a fixing eye and a sure way with women, whom he called "dear ladies." He was a very different person when he sat opposite an inscrutable chief who said, "Now tell me frankly, Forster, your opinion of——"

Forster had a terrible respect for his chiefs, not for their merit, which he believed had little to do with promotion, but for their power. His cherished career, the position and money it represented, might hang upon his choice of words. But to be non-committal for a fortnight without looking a fool was more than Forster could manage. He had loathed his late chief and despised his policy. Now, halting and hedging all the way; he revealed this to Page.

He thought Chard had been losing his grip the last year or two: he had begun to pamper the Somal: there had been far too much consideration of the native point of view: Haji Aden

especially had behaved as if he were official Native Adviser: Chard, of course, relied a great deal upon Major Dane—It was here that Forster broke off.

"Go on, Forster. This is quite confidential."

So Forster went on.

Colonel Cavell was much more outspoken when he rode down to Berbera a few days later to see the Governor. It was not that the Colonel was any less taken up with his career, but that his methods differed from those of the Secretary. A natural assurance had been strengthened by a life's experience of the impression his magnificent presence could produce. Moreover, he had known the Governor at school.

"Disarmament!" he exclaimed, when they got down to business half an hour after his arrival. "What do I think of it? I think so long as the tribes are armed to the extent they are to-day, we are here upon sufferance. It's not up to me to criticise the administration, but now and then you get a lurid light upon it. Look at that affair last year when that Gadabursi caravan shot at Sanderson behind Zeila. What attempt did we make to catch the beggars? Divil a one, though 'B' company was made to get the word."

"I understood that they got over the border. You can't violate a frontier, Cavell."

"Black man's frontier!" said Cavell. "And, what's more, sir, they hadn't. They were lying fat and snug in the heart of the Gadabursi country. When we volunteered to find out, it was "Oh, no! Oh, dear no!" from H.Q. They much preferred to believe their report than ours. They were much more interested in outrages committed against natives—by Derea Waraba for instance. Personally, I think Derea Waraba is very useful to us; I should encourage him by all means. We shan't get any serious trouble with the tribes so long as they've got him, nibbling them in the back along the frontier. It reminds them that we have our uses. Still, it's a rotten position, and once we really got a hold of this country, we could afford to break Derea."

The Governor considered the soldier who looked so directly and angrily at him. He was amazed at his indiscretion. But in his heart he admired it. No one but Page knew that one reason why he had worked himself out of military into administrative work was that he had a sickening doubt of his own ability as a man of action. No failure had marked his military career, but always the dread of some desperate moment when judgment and intelligence counted for nothing, and only blind

animal courage would carry him through, haunted him. That was one reason why he analysed this soldier so carefully; he was to supply the missing quality. Page was to be the brain, Cavell the weapon in his hand, and of Cavell he did not ask more than efficiency and courage. A little stupidity was all to the good.

"And is the C.O. in the same static mood?" Knowing he could hardly expect an answer to such a question, Cavell went on, "I needn't ask. It's in the nature of things. You can't expect a department in these democratic days to frame a progressive policy. Has it in any days? It has always been the men on the spot who've taken the responsibility. If they hadn't, as I figure it, there wouldn't be any Empire at all to-day. Look at the history of India—of South Africa. Major Durell" (he referred to his second in command) "has been reading a book about Queen Elizabeth, and he was telling us how the sailormen had to force the old woman's hand every time and hope for the best. And she wanted them to force her hand, too. Always strikes me that the C.O. is rather like that."

The Governor, still half respecting, half despising the other for his outspokenness went on to discuss the distribution of the Rifles.

"The place for the troops," said Cavell, "is the danger point."

"Hargeisa?"

"Obviously. And, equally obviously, that's the last place where it should be according to Chard's way of thinking. And Hargeisa's the last place where Dane wants to see us. He'd rather have his throat cut like a sheep than apply for a company of the M.R."

The Governor frowned. The limit of frankness had been touched; moreover he had learned what he wanted to know. He gave the conversation a turn and presently they came to personal matters.

"Chard tells me he has given permission for your wife to come out."

For the first time Cavell hesitated. "I know. I never reckoned upon it. And, of course, you will understand, sir, that I never asked for it. I should love to have her, and I know she'd like the life, but of course, it depends upon—things. No good her coming out if she can't come up-country."

"Chard seemed to think she could."

"That would be on Dane's advice, and under the old policy. Dane insists that a station in the interior is as safe as Cheltenham."

They were silent, considering the dilemma into which Chard had put them. The Governor was considering that women and a country like this ought never to come into contact with one another. There was something about a woman that made complications even when she was 4,000 miles away. It looked as if the Colonel's wife were going to force him not only to make up his mind, but also to reveal it.

"I can't exactly cancel the permission, Cavell," he said.

"No, and for my own sake, sir, I jolly well hope you won't."

"If I should decide after careful consideration that the Rifles——" he did not quite see how to finish this sentence, "At least we should take no step in the dark."

"No, sir, of course not."

They looked at each other, but much less steadily since the woman had come into the background of their conversation.

The Governor, to the despair of the Secretary, gave no hint as to the policy he intended to pursue. The only evidence the Secretary had was taken from a visit to Government House of Haji Aden, who was put off twice before he got an interview, and was certainly not offered tea.

The Governor half thought of sending for Major Dane, but in the end, after considering how this would appear to the little official world of Somaliland, demanded a full report instead.

When the report arrived, it was accompanied by another, a long document headed, "An Irrigation Policy." The Governor put it on one side for future reference and studied the other with keen attention. It was excellently composed, though it seemed to him to have a note of authority, almost of pompousness, that jarred. It surely was not necessary to repeat remarks made by natives recalling the episode of Rehoboam's succession. Dane was convinced of the slow, but sure growth of confidence amongst the Gadabursi, "should the administration continue its policy of restraint and consideration for the interests of the inland tribes," and there were possibilities, more remote, yet even more important, which the Governor would find fully discussed in the enclosed memorandum.

The Governor was too intelligent to add by careless methods to the indignation he knew he must rouse in the D.C. at Hargeisa. He broke the news to him in a series of letters of increasing decision, encouraging the other to answer and considering the answers. The other commissioners did not trouble him much. Only Sheringham at Burao was wedded to the old system, and likely to prove difficult, and he was a headstrong man, and already considering a transfer to West Africa. It would be easy to put

him in the wrong, and as easy to get rid of him. There was one other openly-avowed member of the Chard-Dane group, but him the Governor felt he could afford to despise. This was Gerald Blaker, a youth whom Chard had brought out as an unofficial A.D.C., and who, having transferred to the police, was now in Berbera.

During the third month of the new régime things began to move quickly, so quickly that Sheringham decided to go. He met Dane on the borders of their domains.

"Re-registration of all rifles," he said, "and an issue of six month's licences. I guess this is Cavell's doing, and that military occupation is going to be the order of the day. Either they're damned fools, or else they're damned knaves. Cavell, of course, knows what it means. It's the infernal hypocrisy of the business that sickens me. Sounds so harmless on paper, but it's a declaration of war, and, by God! Dane, Cavell knows it. I thought when Chard went it would mean clear the decks for the medal-hunters. I'm not going to stay. I'm damned if I'm going to carry out a policy of which I don't approve."

"You'd better not hurry, Sheringham," said Dane. They were sitting between their tents, a fire in front of them. "Don't give them any chance to draw a rotten inference."

Even in their privacy, Sheringham flushed.

"Thanks," he said. "I mightn't have thought of that And you?"

"I shall stay. If the policy fails they'll want someone to clear up the mess. Besides, I've nowhere else to go."

"And where do you think they will make the first move? Berbera?"

"No. I think—this in strict confidence, Sheringham—at Hargeisa."

Sheringham made an exclamation of incredulity and sat wondering what could have induced the Governor to select for his experiment the very district where the administration had least hold.

Dane was right, though he hardly understood the Governor's reason himself. It was partly because wherever the attempt was first made there would be a violent repercussion in Hargeisa, and his knowledge of Orientals inclined him to grasp the nettle boldly. There was another reason. He did not know Dane himself and most of the men with whom he had talked were not prejudiced in the D.C.'s favour. Furthermore his policy was clean against Dane's advice. Yet, against all these reasons, his instinct told him that if any man in Somaliland could handle

the business, it was Dane, even though he must handle it in remote and intractable Hargeisa.

His plan was to take a first, but not irretrievable, step towards disarmament. All rifles were to be called in, re-registered, and stamped with a special mark. They were then to be re-issued at the D.C.'s discretion, and upon payment of a licence for a further six months. But first the older chiefs, some of whom accepted salaries as government agents or " akils," were to be consulted as to the best method of enforcing this policy. It was hoped that by this means the attitude of the tribes would be tested, the number of rifles ascertained, and a certain proportion of them quietly confiscated.

The Governor offered to send a company of the Rifles to Hargeisa, but Dane made a strong refusal. Followed orders to be firm without being provocative and on no account to force on a demonstration. The Governor was feeling his way ; he had no intention of fighting an issue yet ; it was too early in his régime for that. The D.C., with a clear vision of the result, went about his task. When he announced the new policy in court and asked the older men to consult their sections and meet him again in a week. they stared back at him in silence. During the next days there was much coming and going in Hargeisa district, much squatting in circles outside the town, much preaching behind closed doors in the mosque. On the appointed day, Dane, more than a hundred miles from help, faced a thousand hysterical tribesmen in the dry river-bed at Hargeisa. He smiled indulgently, talked with unconcern, sent his police escort back to the lines, yawned a crisis out of the air and walked home to his bungalow alive. As soon as his message reached Berbera, " C " company set off inland, picked up "A " and " B " companies at Burao and proceeded to Hargeisa. There was no more talk of re-registration, and, for the moment, a quietness that was not peace extended throughout Somaliland.

III

It will readily be understood why Berbera did not make fête for the arrival of the Colonel's wife.

The little cattle-tramp from Aden turned into the harbour at midday. Rhona Cavell, a young woman who paid homage to important moments, was almost stifled with the importance of this one. Here was the capital of Somaliland, here the headquarters of the Protectorate, here her husband. She searched the half-mile between the shaab and the beach for some sign of interest and reception. But Berbera slumbered. Rhona's high-dancing hopes collapsed chillingly. Surely Jack would watch for the boat. She stood still under the stinging sun. Some naked children sat in the surf on the shore. Hawks and vultures prowled about the scum of the harbour. Round the dhows, moving deeply in the lucent water, circled the sharks. They turned, rippling like dark flames and waited. Below on deck the natives rolled into a sitting posture. There was a draping of cloths and winding of turbans.

The situation was not improved when a native driver conveyed her into the shaab in a blistered Ford car and set her down at the bungalow of the Chief of Police. Mrs. Colver, emerging, proved to be the last sort of woman Rhona had expected to find in Somaliland. Referring to the Colonel as "Jack" she said that he was away at the moment, and that the Governor would call shortly and explain. With a few lethargic conventionalities of hospitality, she showed the girl into her room, and returned thoughtfully to her siesta.

Sitting there, in the shadowed room, she looked as young and seductive as even she could have wished. Yet she was revisualising Rhona's face with resentment and alarm. Bad enough that another woman should come to Somaliland; much worse that it should be a girl of this type. She had felt sure that Jack Cavell would pick a woman of the world, with whom, however elegant and accomplished, she could have fought on equal terms.

But a glance at Rhona's quick-flushing face and questioning eyes had shown her that here was a creature of different substance, with whom she could never fight level, who must be her victor or her victim. Fair girls, moreover, had always an added appeal in the tropics. She looked at her face in the mirror; she saw the black hair, touched with unnatural red lights, the face mauve-white with powder, the magnificent carmined mouth. A pulse of anger against Rhona passed through her for the faint dissatisfaction the picture gave. The real mirror had been Rhona's face.

Meanwhile, Rhona had flung herself down upon her bed, too excited to feel tired. Fighting down her disappointment and alarm, she tried hard to await with calmness the coming of the Governor. Solemn and certain as only youth can be, Rhona hailed this as the beginning of a new chapter of her life. Such a moment must be met prayerfully. It behoved her to quieten her mind, review the past and make resolutions for the future.

She looked back upon a life lived in a garden. She could remember no mother: she had grown up the centre of a cheerful, masculine family of father and brothers. Chantrey was the most beautiful of the half-dozen great houses of that part of Dorsetshire, and the daughter of Chantrey had grown up amongst the smiles of peasants and gentry alike. A comparatively wealthy family, they had a bias towards the Arcadian life which prevented them from exploiting their wealth, and Rhona was always the first to hurry back from a visit to town to the beloved house and its thousand tasks, her games, her books, her garden, the tennis parties and picnics, and the dances in the little market town.

Rhona, at twenty-four, had all the merits and defects of such an upbringing. Generous and sincere, she was the sort of girl that all boys can like and all girls can love. She went to stay with a very distinguished uncle, an ex-colonial secretary; ran whistling into his library, and in a moment life was changed for her. There had risen out of a deep chair a long, lean person with the assurance of an emperor and a voice so quiet that you could hardly hear what he said, a soldier, a hero, dark, flashing, frightening, a bronzed and epic person, the like of whom she had never seen. Beside him all other men she knew were boys with whom she had grown up, extra brothers, mere extensions of the family.

It was a question of marriage rather than engagement. Colonel Cavell's leave was short, and the next one problematical.

The father and brothers argued, warned, pleaded. Rhona treated them with gentleness, sympathising with their inevitable disappointment. From her heaven she looked down, wondering at their strange perturbations. Unable to find any words that could be presented to this radiant being ; afraid of being selfish, afraid of losing more than her presence, they submitted.

Even to have met a man of such magnificence as Cavell was good fortune ; to have been chosen by him out of all women was like a fairy tale. To be allowed to go out to him in his own land of adventure was surely the intervention of a Providence intent upon spoiling her. She must accept such indulgence in the right spirit or black ingratitude would meet as black a doom. Almost afraid, she would murmur to herself ; " I will be good : I will try to be worthy of all that has been given me."

She had made the voyage a prelude. She was happy, not because the people seemed to like the look of her, not even because of the deepening sun or the beauty of the pearly sea-gulls adrift about the stern ; but because the ship, whether it heeled through cold hills in the Bay or bit the long jewel of the Mediterranean, was taking her nearer to her husband.

Would the Governor never come ? She got up with a deep sigh of impatience, unpinned her hair and stared at herself in the mirror as if to find comfort and companionship in her own reflection.

Rhona had long, straight hair, golden, but not glittering, and it looked very soft to the touch. Though she was fair, her eyes and brows were dark and stood clear, almost startling under a wide high forehead. She was naturally pale, all her colour being in her bright lips. But, before the mind makes a list of features, it receives a general impression. That given by Rhona was of breeding, of fineness of line and texture. This distinction was more of race than of training ; with it went no grand manner nor any of the ways of a woman of the world. She was often shy, when she would move and speak jerkily, like a boy. Her glance was questioning and easily wavered ; anything strange brought the puzzled frown of the learner between her brows. Only the ring upon her finger told you she was married ; she had the indefinable air of virginity about her, as though she had not entered into the innermost room of her womanhood, was ignorant, indeed, that such a room existed. Her mouth was a girl's mouth ; no habitual expression had formed it ; it awaited the impress of a world as yet unknown, which she greeted from afar, with shy but friendly salutation. If Sir John Chard could have seen the woman he was sending

to Somaliland, he might have hesitated to play destiny. He might have felt that it was like planting a wood anemone in the desert.

Rhona felt very much alone and friendless, but resolved not to take her troubles too seriously. It was all part of the adventure and a challenge to her courage. It was in the East, on the veldt and amongst savage conditions that, if the story-writers were to be believed, westerners found reality and salvation. Here men fulfilled their manhood, and women, to be worthy of them, shed triviality.

When at last the Governor came, Rhona turned to him with almost desperate interest, as if her husband's life might depend upon whether this man of power were a good genie or an ogre.

Page, himself, was not uninterested. This was the woman whose name had figured much in his plans and must not be allowed to figure more. This was she who was to save Cavell. If he had been alone, he would have smiled. Unless it were himself, he could hardly think of a man less in need of salvation or less amenable to petticoat government than Cavell.

He appraised her quickly. A pretty thing, he thought, a possession most men would envy, but nervous, impressionable, sentimental; as a factor in Somaliland, apart from the value others might put upon her, of no more account than a butterfly. He met her eyes, which were as vividly sensitive to impressions as water to shadows, and felt the scorn always aroused in him by people who so revealed themselves. Like most intensely ambitious men, he had early learned to put women in a special sphere, one increasingly below the realities of his own life.

He smiled and then became grave, shaking her hand in a way that indicated sympathy. But the shy response died out of Rhona's face; she sat down, suddenly tired, and looking anywhere but at the Governor who had disappointed her. With all his obvious advantage he could not win her confidence and he saw it. He began to talk in a low voice as if he were telling secrets. It was a pity she had come so far, as, he feared, she had come in vain. Could he have cabled in time, he would have stopped her coming. The truth was, there was trouble upcountry—only a very small affair, they hoped—and her husband had gone into the interior with the Rifles. He had no idea when he would be able to move the troops back and of course, there could be no question of Mrs. Cavell joining the Colonel. The most he could do was to let her stay, if she wished, in Berbera, to await developments. Mrs. Colver, would be delighted to put her up. He was more than sorry.

" But he is not sorry," thought Rhona, stricken by the news and further distressed by her instinctive certainty that the man was giving only a calculated fraction of the thoughts and the knowledge passing through his mind.

" Thank you so much, Sir Lionel," she said politely. " Of course I will stay as long as I'm allowed, and will do my best not to be a nuisance."

" You could never be *that,* Mrs. Cavell," he replied.

So Rhona Cavell made one more of the tiny white population of Somaliland.

Her first days in Berbera were clouded by disappointment and anxiety. Accustomed all her life to reveal her thoughts to friendly ears, she showed Mrs. Colver her trouble. Mrs. Colver was unable to give her any picture of what was going on away, beyond the escarpment, but touched it all with commonplace. She discussed personalities and made withering remarks about men who were only names to Rhona. Rhona regarded her with wonder, unable to fit her into her expectations of Africa. She had visualised the sort of woman able to face the rigours of that land, a hard-riding, spare-living woman, and had resolved not to fail any test. Mrs. Colver seemed to have only two occupations in life, bridge and the manufacture of elaborate underwear. She showed Rhona some of her treasures; opened drawers which foamed with fabrics, gentle as mist and all conceivable pale colours; of wild roses; of cream; of clouded yellow butterflies and blue hydrangeas. Was it possible that all this could be used by one woman? Rhona exclaimed as she turned over frills and laces and embroideries with wonder; then went away, frowning her slight puzzled frown.

Life in the capital was what it generally is when a handful of English people are grouped in an alien wilderness. Socially they had to live by taking in each other's washing. They invited each other to dinner in regular sequence; they played tennis until they were sick of each other's form; they exchanged rupees at the bridge-table and in conversation they gyrated round the short circuit of Somali politics.

Rhona was not at ease in the little society. Used to being a popular member of a free and easy community, she could not understand the wariness that marked human relationships in Berbera. The Governor was uniformly polite but she had the feeling of talking to a lay-figure of diplomacy and courtesy.

The only two people who seemed to Rhona to have any humanity were the P.M.O. and the young policeman. The doctor

who was enormously fat and often drunk, was obviously not much use as a companion, but young Blaker was different. He was the only creature of her age in Berbera. He was of her world and had all the small change of the country-house and hunt-ball currency at the tip of his tongue. He was gloriously reminiscent of her brothers and her adopted brothers. He was charming, too ; witty and audacious, with dark, curly hair and mischievous brown eyes, just pleasantly conceited and deliciously lazy.

It was inevitable that they should drift together. Rhona, drooping under the sunless attentions of her hostess, found new life in his companionship. They had not a featherweight of discretion between them ; the first day they made friends they worked out a complete programme of comradeship for the next fortnight ; upon the second, they communicated to each other their opinions of all their neighbours, not excepting Mrs. Colver nor the Governor. They went tremendous rides before breakfast : played tennis before anyone else had emerged from siesta and then went sailing in a crazy cutter which Blaker had begged off the Custom's officer.

" But, Blaker," objected Rhona when he unfolded this plan, " you don't know the first thing about sailing."

" Not the first, perhaps, but I'm wonderfully adaptable. Listen very carefully, while I explain. The basic principle is to run before the wind. Unfortunately, you can't do that for ever or you'd fetch up at India ; the world, as you justly remark, being spherical. So you choose the psychological moment and get about."

" Ah, yes, but just how do you get about ? "

" Well, it's difficult to demonstrate without a model." Blaker made some splendid gestures. " Then, of course, you just tack home."

" Yes, but what is tacking ? " asked Rhona, who knew perfectly well.

" Really, Mrs. Cavell, this inquisition ! Tacking—why everyone knows, you always tack one way or the other. If you don't tack going out, quite obviously you tack going home. There's only one really important thing to remember about tacking."

" What's that ? "

" To keep an even keel and sail close to the wind. Unless it's a very strong wind, and then, of course, you can't sail so close to it."

" Of course," said Rhona. " Have you ever heard of the ' Hunting of the Snark ' ? "

Blaker told her not to be clever. She could leave that to Mrs. Colver.

It was over this same Blaker that Rhona got into trouble with her hostess. The consequences were far-reaching.

Rhona was under the illusion that the competitive instinct in woman died a natural death at marriage. You were settled, satisfied, withdrawn from the ring. There was nothing settled about Mrs. Colver. She was eager, greedy, almost desperate, continually striving—for what?

For morning calls, for one thing. She was one of those women who are instantly transformed at the entrance of a man. Rhona was not malicious, but she wondered what they found attractive in Mrs. Colver. She did not yet realise that, in a small society in the tropics, people take on the permanency and importance of institutions. You can laugh at them or despise them, but for all your laughter and scorn they remain, immovable parts of your world. The P.M.O. might be reckless enough to say that Mrs. Colver was an impossible woman, but he said it with no dismissive gesture and, though he hated her, he bowed his head and paid tribute to her in time and rupees at the bridge-table.

Blaker, hardly knowing why, was one of her callers. ("But he's a boy!" Rhona would think, bewildered.) A sociable youth, there was something about that clever pink room that reminded him of home. And Mrs. Colver, too, she was hardly the sort of woman you would pick out of a crowd—but then there wasn't a crowd to pick from. And it amused him to cut out the Secretary, whom he disliked.

But all this was before Rhona came.

Mrs. Colver would probably have dropped Blaker in any case. She had been quick to feel which way the political wind was blowing. But this made no difference at all to her resentment against Rhona. Coming home from a dinner-party at the Secretary's, where they had, as usual, worked half-way through the Scottish Song Book (to the vast annoyance of the Governor, next door, who by now could pick out all the untuneful voices and knew just where he could expect them to go wrong), Mrs. Colver said:

"I make it a rule never to interfere in other people's affairs, but in this case I feel it is only friendly to say a word in season. There are some things you cannot be expected to understand when you come new to a country like this."

"As for instance——" said Rhona, not very helpfully.

"Why, if Jack Cavell were here, he would tell you that Blaker is not a suitable companion for you."

" Mrs. Colver, what can you mean ? " Rhona leaped into the elementary duty of defending a friend. " Blaker is just a boy—a sporting, honest, cheery boy. What can people have against him ? "

Mrs. Colver shrugged her shoulders.

" I'll leave it at that." But Rhona knew she never would.

The following day there was a tremendous sea running but she set out in resolute silence for the harbour. Blaker, himself, seemed morose. For the first time, his face, barren of that mischievous gaiety, looked strange and sullen.

She stood on the jetty while he busied himself with the cutter. The sea was really alarming, even where the arm of the spit embraced it. Several of the captains of the dhows stood near her, the Arab *nakhōdas*, debonair people, tight-lipped and light-footed, stood near her, and from the nearest battered hull she could hear the crew winding and thumping and chanting as they worked.

" Well, Mrs. Cavell ? " Blaker had climbed the steps to her side.

" Well ? " she said, smiling.

" The boatmen are gibbering. I don't want you to go if you feel you'd rather not, but I've a certain amount of homicidal mania I want to work off."

" So've I," she replied. " And I think it's getting a bit better."

They embarked under the unreadable eyes of the Arabs. " Surely," thought Rhona in her ignorance, " they would warn us if it were really dangerous."

Nimbly the Somali boatman tried to step ashore at the last moment.

" Oh no, my boy," said Blaker, and suavely ordered him aboard. " We'll take along this jolly old mamaluke, Mrs. Cavell. It's always useful to have some ballast, you know, that you can jettison at a pinch."

Running furiously out of the harbour, Rhona unwisely said, " What's the matter, Blaker ? "

" A fragment of hump," he said with a forced smile. Then, after a pause : " Ever been alone ? "

" N-no—not really."

" Nor had I until I came here. I've been six months out at Las Khorai. Other chaps seem able to stand it. I can't. If it had lasted a week longer than it did I'd have cut and run I daresay you'll despise me, Mrs. Cavell, but I can't help it. At Las Khorai——" he broke off.

" Go on."

" There's the stones and the sand-storms, and the lying Somals, and the bottles in the cupboard, and not another blamed thing. Other chaps stand it but I suppose I haven't the guts. Don't think I haven't kicked myself. Then, when you get fever, it's ten times worse. All the time you want something to happen and nothing does happen except night and day. Thank God! Sheringham's leaving Burao soon. He'll be through this month, and I've a chance of getting that or going as D.P.O. to Hargeisa. It would be luck to be under Dane. He's a great man."

" But why should they send you to Burao? You're not a D.C.?"

" They're always a D.C. short—on leave. So they use a police officer as a stop-gap. He does the same work for half the pay, and eventually, if he does well, he gets into the administration."

" Do you want to do that?"

" I *did*, when I worked under Major Dane. Now, I'm not so sure about it."

" Why?"

He paused. Rhona was truthful as a mirror, so clearly she did not understand the division that rent the administration. When she did, she would know that they were in different camps. Why should he anticipate that moment?

" Now Chard's gone," was his answer.

She hardly heard him, because the cutter ran clear of the spit, and was at once among a mob of a thousand angry, pushing waves. She heaved above their shoulders and fell again, with biting prow into the middle of them, and all the time the low rim of shore fled backwards relentlessly. The boatmen chattered and mumbled, until Blaker, who, whatever his nerves in solitude, was serene as an admiral in this pandemonium of water, turned and cut him into silence with a word.

" He says one woman is always bad luck," he roared back to Rhona at the tiller. " That, if you can't have two, you ought to bring an earthen pitcher to make up."

" Why a pitcher? Because we've got long ears, or because we always get broken in the long run?" she yelled. " What about getting her round?"

" Now you're asking," said Blaker. " Seems to me we'd better go on to Zeila. It's only forty miles as the gull flies."

Rhona's heart began to beat wildly. Blaker gave some orders to the Somal who went with wide eyes to the jib.

" Don't pull her round too quickly. Wait for this wave. Are you ready? *Now!*"

There was an awful moment, while the mainsail flapped a

fusillade, a sick second of immobility and the deed was done. But at once everything was changed. The waves, like a mob that, before unruly, has suddenly turned ugly, clamoured and shouted around them; struck them mighty blows on their thwarts; stood up on end out of the sea, threatening them. The wind, to which they had before surrendered themselves, as if furious to find itself resisted and tricked, screamed, and, snatching handfuls of stinging foam off the waves, flung them into the boat. Rhona's hands grew numbed with the strain of holding the ropes, which, soaked with salt water, were biting her grip. The mast rocked and the sail banged ominously.

"For God's sake, keep her head into it! Here, Mrs. Cavell, let me come."

Inactive, Rhona suddenly realised it was getting dark. Was it the storm of the evening or simply a sort of preliminary dimness that comes to people who are going to die? For never, she knew, could they get back. Men cannot pass alive through moving mountains. It was only a matter of time before one of those monstrous waterslides down which they fell and which shut out sea and sky, poised, crag-like, higher than the mast, would break upon them, and then—the sharks. If only it were not dark she could fight this horror that was coming over her. It was not fear of death. After all, that would be a short business, once tossed into this hurly-burly. Some much greater fear oppressed her, yet it was of things she need not fear if she were to die. She could not understand. It was as though at this moment of excitement a strange idea came to her which made her afraid either to die or to live. It seemed to her that this land was not a country for human beings with souls. It was a place where God's lordship ended. Vast and incomprehensible forces, spawned when steaming swamps slid about the world, still brooded here. No ultimate divine laws governed the laws of nature, and the men who crept about this land were of no more account than the corruption upon a carcase. So Rhona, in a little boat, racing and heeling over in the Gulf, slipped for a moment out of the healthy home of her personality into a pit where there was no sun and no God.

When Blaker who had known all through that somehow he would get back home, helped her out of the boat, her imaginings lifted like a fog and he suddenly appeared very important and intimate. He had lost altogether the character of a pleasant acquaintance. Perhaps it was because, whatever he or others might say, she had seen him in a fine moment. She made herself a promise to remember.

IV

A FEW days later, to the amazement of Berbera, Colonel Cavell arrived. Rising from her siesta, Rhona found Mrs. Colver, in a more than usually flower-like tea-gown, in the act of speeding a visitor.

" Mrs. Cavell, your husband is coming this evening. The Governor has just been here."

Rhona felt like running after him to wring his hand with gratitude. Why had she not been asked to appear ?

" Blaker," she said, drawing him away from the tennis courts that afternoon. " You know that Jack is coming ? "

" Yes," he said, and with the one word Rhona knew that there was something different about him. She continued less certainly, " I won't meet him in front of Mrs. Colver. I'd love to go out and meet him. How can it be done ? Couldn't you come with me ? "

" Oh, I shouldn't go out and meet him," he replied, his eyes contemplating Mr. Forster's service. " You never know just when he'll turn up. Might be midnight. Besides, he'll have Sheringham with him."

" Sheringham ? "

" Yes ; the D.C. Burao. Good old Sheringham ! " His face kindled at the thought of Sheringham. What mighty unpleasant travelling companions !

" Walk with me across the shaab," said Rhona. " Now, then, what's the matter ? "

" I don't know what you mean ! "

" Oh yes, you do. Blaker dear, you're being a beast. You're the one human being, always barring the P.M.O., in Berbera. I tell you I won't stand it. Have I done anything ? Can't we put all our cards on the table in this hateful diplomatic place ? I've never said a word against you and never believed a word, and I'm sure you've done the same. What's come between us ?"

"My infernal folly. Some damned sneak has written to the O.C. about our friendship."

"Blaker! Who?"

"Can't tell you, though it's always possible to guess. I don't know what'll happen. I know he hadn't the slightest intention of leaving the Rifles at present. I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Cavell. I ought to have thought of it."

"No, I ought. But I'll soon explain it to Jack. What brutes there are in the world!"

They were standing alone in full view of the courts. Blaker said that that would never do, and they turned back. Rhona was shivering with anger and repugnance. To be watched, suspected, condemned, and to know innocence powerless as a defence! Not at this first touch of the curb would she bow to their mastery.

The problem of the meeting was happily solved by the D.C. offering her the bungalow of the Assistant Secretary, who was on leave. Here was business almost enough to occupy her thoughts in the interval. The D.C. also brought up a house-boy for her approval. As the Colonel would bring his orderly, cook, and personal boy with him, this would complete the staff. Rhona, who was only learning with difficulty that she must not regard Somals as human beings, looked with interest at the candidate.

Hassan was beautiful. The D.C. explained that he was just out of prison for theft and assault, as though the information had little bearing upon his qualifications. He was a bush-Somal, not yet spoiled by a parasitical existence on the fringes of European life. He had full features, rounded and innocent as an angel's, and his hair sprang back from his face as regularly as the rays around the sun. He wore nothing but a cotton cloth bound about his loins by a great hide belt; his slender limbs, dry and bronzed, had a dull bloom upon them, and were without blemish, but for a few pale scars of spear and thorn. Savage though he was, Rhona took to Hassan, and kept him with her all the time she was in Somaliland.

In half an hour the big white rooms were brushed out. Rhona surveyed them, her head on one side. The Assistant Secretary was either poor or unimaginative; the rooms contained nothing but the regulation furniture supplied by the Public Works Department. There were rows of hideous teak chairs; a huge P.W.D. official desk dominated the sitting-rooms and the regulation druggets, beds, mosquito nets, electric fans and letter racks (there were five of these), completed the contents

of the house. The female eye searched this official hermitage for cushions, pictures, lamp-shades, curtains and anything that could conceivably be adapted for the holding of flowers.

Then the moment was upon her. Jack's voice called "Hallo-o!" and he rounded the corner of the veranda. Rhona jumped up, flushing and trembling. She expected the trouble to come first—immediate reproach and immediate justification, and would indeed have preferred it. Her husband had decided otherwise, it seemed. He embraced her, not quite ecstatically, and kissed her, but not quite spontaneously. Rhona, chilled and punished more than any words could have done, stood away from him, examining him.

"Jack! Why have you come so unexpectedly? Is it true that you're angry with me about something?"

"Not a word of that now. How fit and well you're looking! Sit down a little and let's be restful."

"But don't you want to rest or change, or eat or something?" He had trekked for three days at top speed, and now destroyed all her idea of such journeying by sitting there, imperturbable and immaculate. Frightened though she was, she consumed every detail of his appearance with her eyes—the spare brown knees between shorts and puttees, the perfectly-cut tunic, the dark polish of belt and shoulder-strap, the lean and arrogant head. The dear masculinity of him sitting there, the splendid air with which he carried all the soldier's little accoutrements! She had never seen him in uniform before. In a passion of hero-worship she felt sure that the British army held no man quite so exquisite and masterful as this magnificent creature who, by the indulgence of Providence, was her husband.

"How do you like Berbera?"

"Like it? That's rather difficult to answer. I simply love the sea——"

"I didn't mean that." He frowned. He knew all about the way in which she had enjoyed the sea. "I meant the people."

"Oh, I'm not deeply smitten with them. I'm sorry. Ought I to be?"

"You oughtn't to let them see it if you aren't. I hope you had that much sense. The main thing is—have you got on well with H.E.?"

"The Governor! Well, he's rather difficult, isn't he? I mean—you never seem to get any forrarder with him."

"You must just keep on trying. It's very important to get on with him. He's a perfectly sound fellow, is Page, but rather shy."

"Shy!" She stared at him and then laughed. "Oh, Jack! You can't really expect me to believe that he's shy."

He shrugged his shoulders and Rhona, knowing that she should have been sitting in his arms, instead of upon the edge of an uncomfortable chair, drew a deep breath.

"Jack, we must have it out. I know why you've come. You think that Blaker and I"— she paused, as much at a loss for words as she was lacking in knowledge of the world—"have been flirting," she finished. "Jack, it's so absurd. Blaker is just a boy—a cheerful, stupid, sporting boy. And the only person who's been decent to me in the whole of your horrid Berbera. Do you imagine for a moment, when I've only just married you—but it's silly even to talk about it. I tell you I've ridden with him, played with him, sailed with him, laughed with him. What lying busybody has been imputing evil to all that?"

"I can't tell you," he said. It is hard for a man who loves and possesses a woman to imagine that any other man can value her companionship for a completely different reason, but even he, looking at the indignant and rather nervous girl before him, was inclined to believe her.

"Well, my dear, whatever has been, it's made me leave the Rifles at a very awkward time to come down here and look after you."

"Look after me!"

"I cannot have all Somaliland talking about my wife's behaviour. Blaker ought to be thrashed—silly young fool. Don't you see that in these small places you have to be discretion itself—weigh every word, consider every move?"

"Then you'd better send me straight home. I'm not made like that."

"Perhaps I wasn't, but I had to learn. You do, you know, Rhona, when you run your head often enough against a brick wall. This isn't Chantrey, where everybody knows you and accepts you as much for the sake of your father and family as for your own. Here you've got to make your own way, and you'll be judged entirely upon what you say and do out here, and you can never hope for a favourable construction." Rhona, who wanted to be good, swallowed a violent exclamation. "My dear, I know the ropes here. This is my sphere, and if we're to run in double harness, I must set the pace. I know it's difficult. I'm being frank with you. I know it's damned difficult. Let's face it from the start. There are wheels within wheels about which you know nothing, and I am playing a very

difficult game. I shan't win unless you back me up. We've got to back each other up."

Rhona was silent, and he rose with a sudden jangle and creak of his equipment and walked up the veranda. Coming back, he leaned against a pillar and looked out to sea.

"It was difficult to get you here, Rhona; it's going to be a deuced sight more difficult to keep you here. The Governor wants you to go back by the next boat. Do you?" She made an energetic gesture. "Very well then, why didn't you try to get on his right side?" He paused for the shot to go home. "At this moment everything is at stake—my career, the future of the country. Not many men would have wanted a wife out at this moment. It's a man's country. I wanted you because—well, because I had faith in you. But my decision is not irrevocable. The D.C. Hargeisa is fighting against your going up-country. The Governor wants to get rid of you. If I fight for you, it must be upon a definite understanding." He waited again, but Rhona did not join with the suggested offer.

Suddenly he knelt beside her chair, but not with any gesture of supplication. He took her rigidly bent head in one hand and turned it towards him. But behind the first tears her eyes were still defiant, and her lips were drawn in to steady their trembling. He handled her with a sure touch.

"Little girl," he said, "we don't know each other very well, do we? Things are going to be difficult for a while, even though we love one another. I know you love me—really. But you're young, and you've much to learn. You've come into a new world. I've said it's a man's country. That means the woman who stays in it has got to learn discipline, just as the men have to. It isn't easy. It's damned hard. Perhaps it's harder for a woman. I don't know. I want to make it as easy as possible. All the same, I wouldn't be doing my duty by you, or myself, or the place, if I didn't make you see this. Now, if you want to go back, it's easy to go—no questions, no soreness. I shall understand, and you'll perhaps come back when—well, when things are different here. See?" She nodded dumbly, more tears than defiance in her eyes now. He stood up. "Well, which is it to be?"

He had done well. He had left no gap in his work but one, and this was no oversight. At last she got the question out.

"Do you want me to stay?"

"My dear!"

Then she was in his arms, crying and laughing, her head

thrown back on the hard shoulder in a luxury of relaxation, not caring when the golden hairs twisted and snapped upon his badges. There is no sensation with quite the same flavour as that of having been rebuked, punished perhaps and, after long defiance, to have given in with an abandonment that shuts out for the moment all thought of humiliation and defeat. Rhona, lying in her husband's arms, might have been sobbing out her child's soul at the knee of her nurse in Chantrey nursery. And they both knew they had made a contract as binding as if it had been written, signed, sealed and witnessed.

But this was only the first part of the task which Cavell had ridden north, angry and resolute, to accomplish.

Next morning, early, he was with the Governor. The Governor had made one of his few tactical errors when he thought that the Colonel had been indiscreet at their last meeting. Cavell had a policy, and it suited his book that the Governor should think he revealed that policy by accident, rather than design.

The Governor talked more freely to him than the time before.

" As for disarmament, Cavell, I am inclined to play a waiting game. We have discovered what their attitude is, which is so much to the good, though it may seem a set-back. One thing is clear, that we must keep our eyes open for an opportunity to teach them a lesson. At present their tails are well up, and, as I conceive it, any effort to enforce a general disarmament means a united country. But a local issue upon which they were themselves divided, a sudden movement of the Rifles or possibly a company, with disarmament as a purely local punishment, seems to me a policy, practicable in fact, and reasonable upon paper. I do not think it is possible for such action to raise a general movement against us. Only a public announcement of a general policy could produce that, because that gives them a common grievance, and time to concert. But supposing," the Governor dropped his voice, " that a local punitive measure, carried out in the elementary interests of law and order should lead to a general rising, then——"

" Yes ?" Cavell, suddenly seeing where the Governor's reasoning was taking them, leaned forward, with rising excitement.

" Then I do not consider the country would be tenable, and to pretend to hold it under such conditions would mean simply a gradual but sure decline of our prestige in this part of the East, with the ever-present possibility of some serious disaster to those holding an impossible position here. If these still inchoate views of mine should be proved sound it will mean that this country will be put upon an entirely different footing."

This announcement, which both knew to be pregnant, marked a climax in the conversation.

Cavell wished to show that he presumed to no further revelations. He was indeed anxious that Page should say nothing that he would afterwards regret, his knowledge of human nature telling him that the anger in such cases is generally vented upon the one who has heard, rather than upon the one who has spoken. He, therefore, respectfully dropped the conversation to the personal level.

"And now, sir, what are we going to do about my wife?"

"Ah! this is a matter requiring careful consideration. First of all, what do you feel about the situation at Hargeisa? Do you feel inclined to take her there?"

"Yes, sir, I do. It is useless her remaining in Berbera; she might as well be in London as far as I'm concerned. Now, I take it that you and I are agreed, in opposition to Major Dane, that the Somal not only must, but can, be kept in order; that the Rifles are effective for this, and that wherever the Rifles are there is safety. If I had to tell you that Hargeisa was not safe for a white woman, I'd think there was something very much wrong with the M.R., or else that we were hopelessly mistaken in our estimate of the Somal."

The Governor was startled, but flattered himself that he did not betray it. He saw in a flash the exact relation this woman was to have to his policy; she made an acid test of its sincerity. He knew how a woman's presence advertises a very small blunder in the eyes of the British public. He tried to reckon how she would affect the action of the soldier before him who embraced his plans with an unsubtle enthusiasm, unable to see below the surface. He cursed Chard, whose morbid folly had left him such a legacy. This was the one difficulty and almost enough to wreck all his schemes. His momentary advantage with Cavell and at home demanded that she should go inland, but was it worth while to gain a momentary advantage at the risk of serious complications later? He could not possibly explain the delicate equipoise of the situation to the man of war opposite, still less to the husband in question.

"I hesitate, Cavell," he said, "I hesitate very much to give you the word. Security is a relative term after all, and you and I have not been planning in terms of women. We are in Somaliland, not Bengal, and if the chances of trouble are only one in a hundred I should hardly be justified in letting your wife chance them."

" Sir, I have personal anxieties as well as official responsibilities, and yet I want to take her. The tribes round Hargeisa are eating out of our hands."

" I believe you, Cavell, but——"

" Add to that my wife is as hard-riding and game as any officer in the Rifles, and at the first cloud on the horizon I'd have her half way to Berbera if necessary." The Governor was silent. " There's one more thing, sir, that is of material importance. You know I've begun building a mud bungalow just in case——" The Governor, sure that a vital point was coming, shook his head.

" Well, now, there's one thing in which I heartily agree with Dane, and that is that the Somal has a brain. I agree with him too, that the tribes, especially our way, are watching like cats for any indication of your next move. They may not have much to go upon, but, by Gad, they make the most of what they have. They know for whom I'm building that house, and they know how we regard our women. Now, I put it to you, sir, what are they going to deduce if, instead of coming to Hargeisa, the Colonel's wife goes back to England ? "

" That we've got cold feet—what they're always wanting to assume," concluded the Governor, who now saw that he could attach the whole responsibility to Chard's initial mistake. " But after all, Cavell, Dane is D.C. Hargeisa when all's said and done, and it's going to be damned awkward to force your wife into his district against his will."

" But it was Dane himself who put this point to me." (" I might have known he didn't think of it for himself," thought the Governor.) The Colonel did not explain that the D.C. had first put the point in protest against the building of the bungalow.

" Very well, Cavell," the Governor rose, " you can take Mrs. Cavell back with you for a month or so. I shall be on the move myself soon and shall be coming up to Hargeisa, when we can take stock again. For the present, at any rate, it's perfectly safe. Now I want you to see Forster before you go, about this new consignment of camels."

Cavell gave orders for the trek before he went back to the house. On the veranda he found Rhona, sitting empty-handed. She jumped up and ran to him with a cry of " Well ? " He kissed her and then held her at arm's length.

" Well, little one, it's over the hills and far away for you and me to-morrow."

V

For the first time for two weeks Rhona did not go early to the Club, though she knew that Blaker would be there on the chance of seeing her. She busied herself looking over her kit for the trek and overseeing her packing. Her husband was upon a round of visits, more or less official. All the time half Rhona's thoughts were upon the tennis courts. What would Blaker think of her? Would she be able to speak to him again alone, to say one good word of farewell? She had never let down a friend in her life, but she knew that if she left Berbera without one intimate word to Blaker she would have sinned against friendship, and the honest faith, whose growth she had encouraged between herself and the boy. Yet, dared she imperil the harmony between herself and her husband, so hardly won, so blissful to taste? Distressed in this first conflict of loyalties, she went out to say a commonplace farewell to Mrs. Colver, and offer tepid thanks for her hospitality. As she dipped under the embroidered curtains and met the other's eyes, she suddenly felt a certainty that here was the author of the trouble between herself and her husband.

At the Club, tennis was just breaking up when Rhona arrived. At the far end of one row of chairs she was conscious of a stranger, aloof and alone, but for the attendance of Blaker. At that moment Cavell came out of the Club House and for the first time she saw him in the setting of Somali society. He made an immediate centre, an easy master of the group. Even the treasurer came forward, competing for a word. Beside him, Blaker seemed a schoolboy, lacking even the grace to make his soreness inconspicuous. For a moment, looking through Blaker's eyes, she resented her husband's personal riches, his coolness, his grace, his charm, his figure, his distinction. She remembered what Blaker had told her of his difficulties and his loneliness. Her chivalry demanded that she should go across speak to Blaker, draw him apart, tell him that when once she

had given her friendship, only one thing made her take it back. She glanced from one man to the other, and tried to interpret her conscience. "It's a small thing," she told herself; "it doesn't matter much either way." Then, "It's a big thing, a great deal hangs upon it; it's a test." Suddenly she met Blaker's eyes, pained and abashed. She decided that before she went she would go up and claim him. At that moment there was a re-shuffling of the group and Cavell came up to her.

"Don't avoid young Blaker," he said. "Of course I quite understand, but it isn't good policy. It makes all these gossiping swine think there's something in it. Take my tip; go up, and talk to him and do it now, while I'm here."

Rhona then could only be glad of her resolve already taken, and try not to frown over her husband's curious instructions. So there was to be no test; the issue was evaded for the present.

Joylessly following his directions, she strolled behind the chairs to the two, so obviously marooned at the other end. She was conscious of the slight hush that fell upon the main group.

"Well, Mr. Blaker, I'm to be away with the lark, so I suppose it's a case of au revoir."

"Oh, how sad!" he jerked nervously. "This is Mr. Sheringham, down from Burao."

Rhona, facing him, liked the look of him and, ready with a hand, said, "I'm glad I had a passing glimpse of you, Mr. Sheringham."

He looked straight at her without a flicker of response, bowed slightly, and with a level "How do you do?" turned on his heel.

"You mustn't mind him," said Blaker, almost as startled as Rhona. "He's a Celt, and he's awfully cut up about something."

"Is that any reason why I should suffer for it?"

"I'm sorry. It was rotten. He didn't mean it to you personally."

"Then what——" She guessed and stopped. In silence they wandered away from the Club. From under her hat she looked at him. Where was his audacious youthfulness now? The brown eyes—"doggy brown eyes," she called them to herself—were miserable; the young body was limply held. A rush of tenderness for him came across her.

"Blaker dear," she said, "we've been good friends. But life is difficult. I'm not so free that I can consider only myself. But I like you, and I trust you, and I never will believe a word against you. You understand?"

" Yes," he answered, in a voice that clearly could not manage any more.

" And you're not to be lonely. Don't think I'm being sentimental. If I am, it's quite the first time. Only remember, when the rotten times come, that there are some awfully nice people in the world—people who care and others who would care if they knew, to whom some day you'll tell the whole story, and how hard it was at times, and how you struggled through. And —and—there are some awfully nice girls in the world; clean, sporting, true girls. You must know some; I do. And one day one of them will be your wife. Let her make a difference *now*. Oh—and give my love to the old cutter and—and if you go to Burao, I might see you again. So I won't say goodbye. Au revoir."

" Au revoir—mate!" He crushed her hand, gave her a twisted smile and walked away quickly. Rhona, wondering what curious emotion had moved in her and made her speak, returned slowly to the Club.

Blaker went straight down to the shore and walked for miles along the sea. When he returned to his bungalow, he found Sheringham, sitting astride a chair on the veranda, and gazing at the large whiskey he held in both hands.

Sheringham, hot-headed and imprudent, had served Somaliland well and truly. Many years of his man's life and more of his man's strength he had put into the service, without reckoning. Authority which, in it's human embodiment, he too often denounced, in its abstract superiority had his homage. That Sir Lionel Page, man, should dislike him was easy to understand; that the Governor of Somaliland should let him go without a word of recognition for his work was a mortal wound.

" ' Many oxen are come about me: ' " he chanted unhurriedly, " ' fat bulls of Basan close me in on every side.

" ' They gape upon me with their mouths: as it were a ramping and a roaring lion.

" ' For many dogs are come about me: and the council of the wicked layeth siege against me.' "

" All the same," said Blaker, who fully understood, " you needn't have behaved like that to Mrs. Cavell. She was frightfully hurt."

" Oh, rats! He that is not with me——Anyhow, she deserves all she gets for marrying Cavell."

" Och, you're mad!" muttered Blaker.

" I wonder if I am, Blaker boy." Then, inconsequently,

" Even now, if he'd asked me to stay, I'd have thrown up West Africa."

" Gosh, Sheringham ! Do you *like* Somaliland ? I hate it."

" I've given her such a devil of a lot. And now at last, I seem to have got the hang of her. Now, *you*, I've something to say. From what Mr. Secretary let drop, I shouldn't bank too much on getting Burao. If they should send you to Zeila—what's the matter ? " Blaker stared at him as a man stares at the black and white shapes in a nightmare. Zeila was as remote as Las Khorai. Sheringham went on hurriedly. " No, I don't think they could, Blaker. I'm being a fool, I except. Cheer up, old son. Oh, Blaker, I wish God had made me a school-girl and then I could weep. But then, if God had made me a school-girl I shouldn't be here, for this ain't no land for school-girls nor for yellow-headed little Mrs. Cavells either."

They were silent. In the next-door bungalow they could hear the after-merriment of a dinner-party. Further away, across the silent shaab, a ragged chorus, an untidy warp of men's voices and through them the shrill woof of a woman's.

" Oh, my darling, oh, my darling, oh, my da-*ar*ling Clementine ! "

Both felt their isolation. In the harbour a single light showed where the little cattle-steamer swayed at her moorings. With elaborate carelessness Sheringham said as he rose and stretched himself,

" Oh, by the way, Blaker, a couple of chiefs from Burao are in the town. They said they would come and say ' Salaam ' and bring me a rather swagger knife as a present from Somaliland. Your boys didn't say if they came while we were out ? "

" No."

" Oh, it's all right. I didn't really expect them."

Coming back from her dinner-party, hand in hand with her husband, Rhona reflected that she had enjoyed it. This was partly because he had been there, partly because it was the last. Watching her husband, glorying in his popularity, she wondered why she had got on so badly with all these people. How well he understood them, giving them just the right amount of confidence and friendliness, never too much or too little. Beside him she was as unaccomplished in the art of living as a child from a nursery. She had thought defiantly all these weeks that it was enough to be honest, standing four square in the entrenchment of one's own principles. If the world accepted you in

that position, so much the happier : if it did not, by so much had it condemned itself. But this was not enough. To be good was not enough to justify one in being foolish. She flushed at the thought that the man beside her, so expert in the game of life must see in her a very clumsy partner, a country girl, badly in need of his training. She did not know what he knew very well before he married her, that she had a grace which made it impossible for her to be awkward or undignified, that her very shyness was a charm. It was partly for this that he had chosen and loved her, because she seemed to combine in herself everything that he needed—beauty, breeding, distinction, influence, money, but not enough art or strength ever to challenge his It seemed he was right, for Rhona in her humility, resolved to be stiff-necked no longer, and even when she could not understand, to be silent and to learn of him.

" I wonder," she said, " that, as Mr. Sheringham is going to-night, they did not have a send-off party for him."

" Sheringham has queered his own pitch. He brings emotion into business. He tried, between ourselves, to explain to the Governor how to run Somaliland to-day. If he's alone to-night, it's entirely his own fault."

Rhona guessed that he would not be alone, but she said nothing. She undressed thoughtfully and went out alone on to the flat roof. The silence was only broken by the crying of animals ; the shrill scream of the jackals ; deeper in the desert the more masculine call of the hyena. Then the dogs, yapping all together, would make answer from where they cowered among the huts, angry and frightened.

These noises were far distant ; there was silence in the shaab. On one side, just beyond the wall, the dome of a mosque lay like a fallen moon among the palm trees ; on the other, slender and feminine as a woman's finger, the minaret of another mosque pointed through the stars. Straight in front of her lay the dark violet sea. The trees did not move at all. The moon, rising late, made the white roof about her like a pool of milk.

She told herself that the future was simple. She would cling to her loyalty and her love. Both bound her to her husband, and she was content that it should be so. Thus she would follow a straight course through all the mazes of personalities and policies that might spread before her feet. There must be no more friendships, such as that of Blaker. It was a loss, but the greater must swallow up the less.

Standing there, a pale column growing out of the pale roof, with a rich moon shadow behind her, she began to wonder if

she were alone. Had she in her simple survey and simple plan reckoned with all the forces? Was there something which she had forgotten, but which would not forget to deal with her? What she saw about her was beautiful, but then it belonged there no more than a ship to the sea. As the ocean surrounds the man-made, transitory ship, so the desert which she could not see crept up to the shaab with its walls and houses and hardly-cherished verdure. There came to her again the thought she had had in the storm with Blaker, but this time it was clearer in outline. She told herself that she, Rhona, was too sane to harbour morbid ideas, but the night took her as a man takes a glass, and filled her with thoughts that were not her thoughts.

Perhaps the spirit of the continent, which men had hunted since the dawn of Time, was abroad that night like a savage and cunning wild beast, walking in one of the few parts where it could still find refuge.

Africa was so old and yet so young. Civilisations had besieged her, had clung to her fringes through their short centuries of domination, with their palaces and chattering markets, their heresies and diseased dynasties, and had left behind them nothing but their broken tombs, fragments of pillars and bones. Europe had trampled upon her and pillaged her; had raided her dark children for slaves, dug into her vitals for hidden ores, massacred her wild beasts and forced her way towards her secret places which still seethed with an uncouth and primæval life. If any continent knew the worst in the heart of man, it was she, who had bred no sons to call her "home," but had been made the slave and spoil of strangers. What had she not seen of greed, of brutishness, of cruelty? The least was that of her own wild beasts and wild men. Yet she still kept her secret and her spirit was still unconquered. Patient, hating, she waits, striking back when she can, guarding herself, ravished though she is, with heat and thirst, fever and loneliness, degradation and madness. There are men who have used her and thrown her aside, who cannot kill their lust for her, and, knowing what she is and how they have treated her, go back to her and she has her ultimate revenge. There are some men, and they are not many, who have known for Africa a compassion so strong that, seeing their own effort in its desperate proportions, they have offered their lives for her redemption. She, as though they were too few to weigh in the balance against the sins of their brethren, or perhaps because, like a tortured animal, she is too savage to know friend from foe, gives them the same return of sultry hate, watching, with the patience that her long

knowledge of men has taught her, for the moment when she can destroy them.

If such knowledge as this was awake that night over the dead land, it did not come to Rhona. Only after long years could she have thought such thoughts. She had an emotion rather than an idea. She felt herself, standing there, pale and fair in her silken wrap, altogether an alien in that ancient, savage land. If she prayed at all, it was that she might remain so. There were things that she was afraid to feel or even to know. If the country had a spirit, might she never be compelled to see it! If it had a demand to make of her, God grant she might not hear it!

VI

They left Berbera as the smoke though not the fire of dawn came towards them from the Eastern sands.

Of that long journey inland Rhona never kept any consecutive memory. It remained with her as a series of pictures and of conversations, the background an immense effort of physical endurance.

They crossed the maritime desert to the great escarpment in a motor-lorry. The desert terrified Rhona. It lay east and west, the warm sea drowning its northern rim, while to the south the mountains rose clear out of the limp sand. It was like the carcase of a land that had died of thirst; it was littered with rocks that lay on it, blenched like bones. Far away behind and below them, Berbera enamelled a patch of the coast.

"Well, dear, its into the blue now. Are you frightened?"

"No," said Rhona, smiling blissfully, last night's fears far away.

"Rhona," he said, after a moment's thought. "Do you realise that from a political point of view, Blaker was the worst man you could have chosen for a friend?"

"But we never talked politics."

"That doesn't matter. If you knew everything you'd see that you've made a great mistake."

"But I don't know everything, and I don't want to. I don't see that its a woman's business to worry about the problems and administration, and principles of native government. Somaliland is nothing to me but the place where you happen to be; you see, Jack, I love you, and that's enough for me. I'd defend your policy against the world."

"Even to do that," he said seriously, "you must see something of my point of view."

"Very well, you shall coach me during the journey."

It was in this way, lying in his arms, loving him and submitting to him that Rhona heard his own case from his own lips.

He told her much of the Eastern mentality in general, and that of the Somal in particular, bade her revise her standards and quench her sentimentalities. He told her of the ultimate mercy of immediate hardness, of the peace and order British rule had brought to Somaliland, and of the weakness and blurred vision that had imperilled that rule. She learned a little of the relation in which he stood to the situation, and much more, with his help, she assumed. Eagerly she sketched in for herself a picture of her husband, misunderstood but unwavering, a straightforward soldier, who saw the realities of the situation, successor of the stern Empire-builders of the past, who, for the sake of Motherland and native alike, were willing to bear in silence the accusation of harshness. The clean-visioned eyes and clear face looking up at him were like a virgin page, and he wrote upon it. There was hero-worship in her eyes, and that, too, he used, deliberately making the bond between them out of his supremacy and her complete acceptance of it. He did not consider whether it was in her to love differently, not upon her knees before an image, but wrapping herself around his humanity, knowing the whole man, and loving even his faults, rousing in herself for his aid that maternal feeling without which no woman's love is complete.

Before they reached the great ridge they passed through a tumbled, hilly mass, speckled with vegetation, aloes, thorns and ergin. So little did these plants give any impression of life that Rhona was reminded of her childhood, and how, to make a garden on the shore, she had plucked twigs and pushed them into the sand, finding them next day, withered and sparse in their shaley bed.

So, picking their way like ants through a chain of molehills, they approached the main escarpment. It gained every mile in rugged and impressive height. The hills seemed to run like a vast natural wall east and west. Here and there they were crowned with long cliffs, as regular as if some classical Emperor had crested them with slave-built battlements.

They halted in a little eyrie of a depression scooped out in a lap of the hills. Rhona watched Cavell giving his orders in that quiet voice for which the natives listened with such desperate attention. She caught his wrist as he strode past her and pressed it to her cheek.

"Dear," she murmured, half to herself, "if you only knew how magnificent you look standing there in the firelight!"

He stooped down.

"And what of you, you beautiful one, you queen of the

night ? " he whispered, gripping her shoulders until she could have cried out with the pressure, and she, adoring, but unimpassioned, caught her breath, and answered " Yes."

Up the escarpment, on a track like the bed of a mountain torrent that has gone dry. There was nothing here but boulders and cactus. Some of these were like nightmare trees, stakes winding in a coruscation of ashy-green, stiff as coral. Some of the valleys were soon so far below that Rhona dared not look down at them. Yet hardly dared she look up at the crags she must climb.

Some of the heights seemed built of purple volcanic rock. They were formed in convolutions so liquid that they seemed still hot from the awful upheavals that spewed them there They spoke of wounds and agony ; there were scars and long rusty stains ; no rain had soothed their torture ; no foliage covered them with its mercy from the burning sun. Rhona thought of the West, where every chasm is velvet with trees, and cups a stream, while creepers drip over the crags, and the verdure of grass lies everywhere on the long nakedness of island and continent.

When, at last, they topped the ridge of the plateau they found themselves close to the Governor's hill-station of Sheikh. Like the little white balls of a puzzle that had run into a crack of their surface, the half-dozen houses cowered in a crumple of the iron plateau.

The worst part of their journey was the trek from here to Hargeisa. They must cross a plain more than a hundred miles wide, desert and all but waterless. The plain is scantily veiled with scrub, but the strange thing about these thorn trees is, that instead of veiling the desert with some pitiful pretence of life, they speak of death more than the sand itself. They have no grace of growth and none of the prayerful up-reaching of Western trees. They remain, all alike, flattened and despairing. Nor does their smallness speak of youth, for they are crippled and twisted like old men, who have been stunted by disease or torture. If some trees are gracious spirits, these are the devils of the trees, outcast into their own hell, condemned to an eternal old age, forever dying and never dead.

At first there was some life in the bush. Africa has no little people, no spirits, gracious or mischievous, compact of twilight and peasant fancies. Yet even her harsh bosom nourishes some sweetness. The fairies of Africa are her little stem-legged buck There are many of these small kinds and all of them lovely

they are slim, dry, alert, galvanic little creatures; they have crisp hair and polished hoofs and noses; small spikes spring from their heads and their eyes are bright and gentle. Here Rhona saw the dik-dik, the smallest and most numerous of its kind in Somaliland. It aspires, with its long legs, to the dignity of a buck, but it is not much more than a hare on sticks. They go in pairs and have a bluish bloom upon their sandy fur; in the early haze, they looked like little animated blue plums, scuttling round the bushes. They encountered nothing. There was only the same skinny, sparse, crop of accursed trees; grey-green, they furred the sand like a rotten mildew. The sun sat upon Rhona's shoulders; the dust choked; her head drooped under the helmet.

It might have been the second day—for there was nothing to distinguish one day from another—that she had another misunderstanding with her husband. She was exhausted, her face and arms were scorched with the unusual exposure, and she was chafed with the long hours in the saddle. More wearying than anything, her pony was tired. She always found it difficult to keep level with her husband, who made the pace. Now, every few yards, she must touch her pony with her heel. Some twist of pride had made her vow that she would never admit that she was tired. So now, when Cavell said, "We ought to do another five miles. Are you tired, dear?" she answered, "No," and dipped her helmet over her face, so that he could not see it. When, after an endless period of endurance, the halt was called, she and her pony stayed still, both violently trembling.

"Stiff?" said Cavell. "I'll lend a hand."

She shook her head, swayed, and fell into his arms. He was all concern and tended her skilfully. Afterwards when, drowsed with sleep, she was sitting by the fire, he turned to her suddenly:

"Rhona, darling, why didn't you tell me you were tired?"

She did not know what to say. The gentleness of his attentions had disarmed her. After all, why had she not told him?

"What is it, sweetheart?" he went on. "Have I hurt you in any way? Don't forget I'm rather unused to women. You're so sensible about most things, that I naturally expect you to say when you're tired. I know its a hard journey for you. But why make it more difficult?"

It seemed to Rhona that she was utterly in the wrong. He was a man, practical and straightforward. She was trying to qualify for a man's country. Yet at a time when common-sense was all that was needed, she must make trouble for both of them out of some caprice, utterly, damnably feminine. So,

instead of giving the answer she had intended, should he ask her, which was " Because I wanted you to find out, dear," she condemned herself and once more surrendered. Rhona was a girl who hardly knew tears, but because she was very tired her surrender took that form.

" I'm a silly fool," she said. " Do you think it's me, Jack, or just the woman in me ? Don't lose patience with me. I will be good, so good, in Hargeisa. I'll behave like a little, yellow mouse, and whenever you stamp your foot, I'll run into my hole."

" You're a funny little girl," he said. Her head was against his shoulder, and he drew the pins out of her hair, and coil after coil came tumbling down, untwisting itself as it fell. The little hardness that had risen between them was melted away, and he was happy in his dominance. It was almost upon his lips to say that he loved her for these feminine caprices that roused him to show his power over her, but he checked the words.

Rhona, to her own surprise, woke up in the night. The desert outside was moonlit. She leaned over her husband and kissed him lightly upon the hair over his brow.

" Dear, I do so love you," she whispered. " Isn't it enough to love a man and for him to love you ? Why do these frets come between us ? Its my pride and childishness. I will try to be more sensible and more worthy of you. Dear, dear man, that I love, if you only knew how happy I am going to make you ! "

In the evening they curved down into a depression between two low ranges of hills and found Hargeisa.

VII

HARGEISA is an obvious place for a station. Here the camels pad past, threading the caravan route to Abyssinian Harrar with cloths and dried skins upon their backs. Here, too, is a spacious river-bed, where, when the rains break, a yellow spate boils down an hour or two a week, and sinking, suckles the roots of the trees upon its bank, until they tower above the land's poverty, and, from the ridges, mark a rich wandering line amongst the grey scrub. Near the wells, there is always a changing Somali encampment, and one or two stone buildings where an Arab, in fear and trembling, keeps his store of rice, dates, coloured cloths and scarves.

Half a mile from the "town" stands the Court House; another half mile from it the police-lines and the D.C.'s bungalow. The Rifles were camped upon the opposite side of the river-bed, straggling amongst the thorn trees, with their camel and pony lines, store-houses and officers' tents, all girdled with a strong stockade.

Major Dane sat on the veranda of his little three-roomed bungalow of white-washed mud. Some weeks had passed since the Colonel and his wife had ridden down from the ridge. His hands were empty, but he was busy. He was pondering alternative methods of attacking a problem in higher mathematics, a rather unsociable recreation he had developed in loneliness.

After a while he rose. There was still an hour before sunset. He went first to the police-lines. On one side of them, long and narrow like a stable, was the prison. The prisoners were sitting outside, resting after the day's labours, their knees linked by chains. All the policemen stiffened and saluted at his approach. Between the lines and the river-bed there was a couple of hundred yards, scattered with thorn trees, aloes and ergin bushes. Here were two tall, wattled enclosures. One held his cows. He went in and watched the men milking them. The other held his three ponies. One of these had just foaled, and with expert

care he examined the nervous mother and her little one. He then went on to a stockade in which the half-dozen riding camels, told off for his own use and that of the police, were being tended and fed. Another khaki-clad figure appeared, passing through the trees. This was young Jackson, the D.P.O.

"Hi, Jackson!"

The young man came and stood beside him, holding his tall figure slouchily. He was fair and blue-eyed, not without ability, but with a shyness that led him into remarking the obvious.

"Well, sir, still the same old lot, eh?"

"Don't know about 'the same' Jackson. Number four looks to me as if the tick-bird has been at him. Find out who was in charge to-day. Where were you off to?"

Jackson hesitated a minute and blushed.

"Just off to the M.R. for a sundowner."

Jackson had cursed the Rifles with every hard word he knew when he heard they were coming. He had vowed to his unresponding chief that he would never darken their doors. But that was many long weeks ago. Perhaps it was inevitable that, when the officers foregathered at sundown at the long table between the tents and yelled joyously for drinks, the young policeman should be there. Certain it is that now the Major greeted sundown alone. That was why Jackson blushed and beat his foot with a riding-crop.

"Coming?" he said at last.

"Not to-night, Jackson."

"They're a cheery lot of devils," said Jackson. "Especially at six o'clock. After all, they can't help being sent here, and I know they'd be awfully bucked if you'd go across."

"You can tell Durell there's pot-luck for him if he cares to come over. No need to send an answer."

"Right. So long, sir."

Dane turned towards the river-bed away from the bungalow, and was soon checked by a series of low barriers or zaribas, made of thorn. These shielded gardens, which ran at intervals along the banks of the river-bed. There were wells in the centre of each garden, and an Arab and several Somali gardeners were at work. The sun set before he had finished all he had to see in the gardens, and he went back in the brief African twilight to his bungalow.

From beyond the river-bed he caught at times a distant shout or laugh from the M.R. camp, which was shuttered from his view by the thorn trees. No sense of isolation came to him. He had lived too long alone not to have learned economy

of wasteful emotion. He had known that the atmosphere of the Mess was bound to be hostile to him. Whatever feelings individuals might have about him, it was the line of least resistance to join the chorus against the man who resented their presence. Major Durell, it is true, was an old friend of his, but he was out for peace and quiet, and was generally too busy mixing his drinks to take sides either way.

There was no question of a boycott. The officers in twos and threes dined at the bungalow, and the D.C. appeared at least once a week at the Mess. The Colonel saw him most days. The new Adjutant, a temperamental Irishman with blue eyes and black hair, was not quite sure whether he would not offer all his stormy allegiance to the D.C. And though Jackson was teased until he writhed by the subalterns, yet it was known that his loyalty in essentials was not to be challenged. That evening, however, consideration for Jackson was strained.

"Got permission?" Newsome, a savage, red-haired subaltern, sitting with his feet on the table, jerked this over his shoulder as soon as Jackson approached.

"Oh, don't be so clever," protested the D.P.O., always a little shy at attacking the united group of the Mess.

"Well, I refuse to be responsible," went on Newsome, scowling. "The Rifles are deeply enough in disgrace as it is. Eh, doctor?" The M.R. doctor was absorbed in his sunset collection of drinks, which he always arranged like chessmen in front of him, and merely grunted. "You're late," Newsome continued. "Kept in, perhaps?"

"Oh, shut up, Newsome, and order me a peg!"

"Well then, you——" Newsome kicked violently under the table in the direction of a long and elegant young man. "Cheetham, if you've a soul above drink, lament the shame that has fallen upon the sons of war."

"How old are you, Jackson?" began Cheetham briskly. "I feared so. Too young, too innocent, to understand. Know then, that we of the Rifles are free men and hunt when and where we list. So it was from the beginning. Now your precious D.C. has written to the Colonel about shooting, and if he had known anything about the psychology of the Mess——"

"Its this way, Jackson," broke in Captain Grainger, Cavell's right-hand man. "Those two will never reach the point in a month of Sundays. Dane has written to Cavell—he's just read the letter to us——"

"And wasn't the old man purple in the face about it?"

"—to explain to us, now that the close season is nearly over,

that he will be obliged to enforce the game laws in this district with the utmost stringency."

"And—thank you for this kind thought——" drawled Cheetham. "He thought it only fair to tell us this beforehand."

"And further," added Newscome, "for alas! all is not yet told, there is to be no shooting within a radius of two miles round the camp. Think of it! You've got to beat out two miles if ever you want a little bird for your dinner, my unfortunate Jackson."

"That's not an order." This was Rankin, the Adjutant.

"Oh, no! Oh, dear me, no! Its a matter of etiquette. Special instruction in manners! If we stay much longer in your D.C.'s district, we shall soon become perfect little gentlemen."

"There are reasons," said Rankin. "First, noise; second, danger of ricochet; third——"

"Oh, let me tell him the third," broke in Cheetham. "You'd never guess it in fifty shots. Because it frightens away the dear leettle birds——"

"Tweet—tweet!"

"Mark over!"

The Mess roared and stamped with delight.

"There may be something in that," said Rankin, twisting an empty glass. "There was Francis of Assissi——" The merriment died away. They were not yet sure how to take the Adjutant. In the lull, Jackson delivered his message to Durell who had just wandered out of his tent.

"I'll trot around after dinner."

"I'll come with you," said Rankin.

"And why," Durell sat down and signed to the boy for his drink. "Why don't some of you little boys come around too, and make this noise in front of Dane? Its a pity to waste it here."

"Because you are going to be an uncle to us," said Newsome. "Your well-known tact, Major—let it function to-night."

After dinner, across the nullah, Durell did his best to make Dane see reason, while Rankin smoked in a corner and watched the two. Looking at his host with lowering interest, the temperament in him began to rouse at the nearness of another, just as a cat's fur is said to rise, tingling at the approach of storm. To the Irishman, the whole Mess were blockish things. In a world of work, sport, physical needs, and a very superficial human contact, they lived. Into another world they could not enter; they did not even know it existed. Yet Dane had never answered his eyes or in any way acknowledged a bond with him. Sitting

silent, Rankin allowed his fancies to play about the other. In this mood he was interrogative as a woman, and as sensitive. "What is this man like?" he asked himself and his eyes answered him.

Dane was a compact person of middle height, broad shouldered and thin-flanked. His hair was tawny gold, and, though he was some years on the right side of forty, it was shot with white in a half-circle from his temples. It grew square from his forehead. Being a fair type, the tropics had marked him deeply. Face and throat were stained a dull, dark red. His skin was seamed and spare. It passed taut over his high cheekbones, drew down to make cheeks slightly concave, and gripped the jaw so that the line of the bone stood clear. The D.C. had one feature, remarkable at a first glance. His eyes were large and unmistakably green, with black pencilling round the iris. They were set deep and wide in the head, and the overhanging brow bristled with coarse, reddish hairs. Altogether a weather-beaten but reflective person, who looked as though he knew how to keep silence, and was not to be classed as any particular type.

At this moment Durell turned to Rankin for confirmation of some point.

"Sorry, I wasn't listening."

"Isn't Dane getting unpopular with the boys about this business?"

"Highly unpopular."

"What can you expect?" asked Dane. "They mostly get seconded here on account of the shooting."

"Or the chance of a scrap," put in Rankin.

"Or the chance of a scrap—silly asses."

"Thank you for that," murmured Rankin, but Dane did not take him up.

"The fact is," said Durell, "you're like one of those Salvation Army blokes who get conversion and get it bad. No man ever packed more fighting into his life than you, and now you've had enough of it, you won't allow anyone else to have any fun."

"There's no fun in fighting."

"Well, I'm bound to agree, having spent my life evading it," said Durell. "But what about the shooting? You've shot all the way from Rhodesia to the Sudan, and Cheetham swears that at one time you were an elephant-poacher in the Congo. Now you're glutted with heads and you set up as a spoil-sport."

"These personalities," answered Dane demurely, "seem to me beside the mark. We have a law here for ourselves and the natives alike."

"They don't keep it."

"Will they keep it any better if we break it ourselves? The game is thinning out. When I first came here you might meet lesser kudu half a mile out of Hargeisa. Now you've got to go ten miles south at least to get even a sight of one, and as for greater, you've got to go far into the Gadabursi country. And these boys have their licences. You're no shikari, Durell; perhaps you haven't looked at the list. It gives them one elephant and every year one greater, two lesser kudu, two cheetahs —that's damnable—two oryx and so on with buck down to twenty dik-dik. Lions, leopards and the smaller fry of beasts of prey are free of licences altogether. Isn't that enough for them?"

Rankin, not much interested in hunting, fell out of the conversation again. He looked at Dane's bookcase. There were two rows of worn books on mathematics, botany, agriculture and geology, with a number of seed and forestry catalogues. Below, the Koran, the Indian Penal Code, Arabic grammars and dictionaries, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Kipling, and the Oxford Book of English Verse. Below these, a number of novels, mostly detective and adventure stories. His first thought was, "His mind is untrained"; the second, "He has no sense of humour." He looked again at the shelves. He could find no key to Dane's character.

"——no reason why she shouldn't come oftener to the camp and see what's going on. But Cavell doesn't seem to encourage it, and of course she eats out of his hand."

Rankin's attention returned to the talk. There was only one "she" in Hargeisa. He looked curiously at the D.C. Dane was laughing. "What a pity he doesn't do that oftener," thought Rankin, surprised at the transformation in his face.

"Well, I don't see that I can do anything about it, Durell. I've hardly spoken to the lady myself. Presumably she's quite happy in her bungalow. It's a very nice one; I built it myself. And whose hand should she eat out of, if not her husband's? And why should a woman of her age appreciate your funny stories and funny faces? You must do your hair better and try and remember what manners you once had, that is, if you ever had any."

"Curse your impudence!" said Durell, and rose to go. "I don't believe she'd be here at all if you'd had your way."

"You stick to soldiering, Durell," said Dane.

Rankin followed Durell automatically to the door, but stopped there. "I think I'll stay a little, if you don't mind, Dane."

Dane, without answering, called for a boy with a lamp, and Durell's large form flickered off down the slope.

"Well, Rankin, what is it?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing particular. Thought I'd stay for a bit. I see you read poetry."

"Ye-es. Sheringham was a bit of a poet. He used to recite odds and ends of stuff when we met on the Burao border. But I've taken to it rather late in life and I find I'm inclined to harp on a few strings."

"As——"

"Milton—Lycidas and Samson, Shakespeare—especially the sonnets, Keats—most of Keats. Durell seems liverish. What's the matter?"

Rankin stared, laughed, and got up.

"All right, Major, I'm going. Durell's all right. Mixes his drinks with too much imagination, I should guess."

"How are you shaking down?"

"How should you suppose?"

"Just as well as you'd care to." There was a hint of coldness in the answer, and Rankin, his personality alert as a snail, knew he had thrust out too far, and drew back in a flash, bruised and watchful. Dane went on. "I've a word of advice, if you don't mind my interfering. The place where the men are taking the camels this week is no good. It's full of ergin bushes and bad for snakes. Lost any?"

"Two this week."

"Too many. Go west up the river, between a mile and two miles. Especially the left bank."

"That's where they go shooting."

"Well, they must go elsewhere. It's within the limit."

"You're not going to enforce that?"

"Force won't be necessary. Another thing, Rankin, I've got some spare camels coming up from Berbera; if there's anything you want sending up for the Rifles, let me know early at the court."

They were now strolling towards the river-bed. Rankin burst out, "Why the devil you want to do anything for us beats me. I'd see the Rifles in hell before I'd lift a finger for them if I were you."

"Then you'd make a jolly rotten D.C."

"I wish, Major, you'd give me your version of this political business. I want to get the hang of it all."

"There's no need for you to. You're a soldier, and its outside of your job.

"I wish you'd repeat that to the O.C. His idea of discipline extends to the opinions his officers hold upon the administration."

"I know all about that, Rankin. Good-night."

"Good-night. Look here, Major, I've made a bad impression on you to-night. I wanted to make a good one. But I'm a nervy, temperamental sort of beggar. I . . . I don't altogether hit it off over there ; give me another chance."

He could see nothing now but a cigarette end glowing in the darkness. Dane answered :

"That's easy. But don't reckon on getting much satisfaction out of me. It won't do you any kind of good to be round here too much. And you mustn't get it into your head that I'm any great hand at literature. Good-night."

Dane, getting into bed, upon which his pet cheetah was outsprawled, smiled once to himself about Rankin and his temperament, ran Sappho's wiry, vital tail between his fingers, and looked out of the window to see what creatures had come to take advantage of his hospitality in the shape of a sunk tank in the garden. Then he got into bed, and his thoughts went back to what was dominant in his mind, what chance there was of his young cedars surviving to the rains.

But the domination in his mind was only that of a man set upon making enough money to buy a string of pearls. The trees were to make richer fertility for Somaliland. It was here that the man's passion, felt by Rankin, had its secret business. There was no question of love ; Somaliland held him ; he had finally given himself up to its service. He did not brood about it, and when he walked at night down the river-bed, a white road to the moon with fringes vibrant with cruel energy, he was not seeking words for its expression.

In a long sojourn, beginning as a mere boy, he had slept many hundred nights with the African sky for roof. If he had changed his employments it was in order that he might not change continents. Lonely and difficult work had seemed to become his by a natural law. Unconsciously he had fled before the encroachments of civilisation. From the Transvaal to Rhodesia, from Rhodesia to East Africa to make money planting and prospecting in land, thence to Central Africa to spend the money wandering and shooting. Still in the middle twenties, he had

joined the King's African Rifles, and found himself on the northern frontier, mixed up with a tribal rising and sent upon an expedition after gun-runners on an unmapped border.

As rapid promotion drew him towards headquarters he amazed his brother officers by transferring into the Colonial service and shipping for Zeila. If the crowded summary of his career sounded romantic, Dane himself destroyed the idea. Whatever he might be with intimates, in the course of ordinary contact he never became animated except about practical, indeed technical, matters. What made him so strange to the average man was not his quietness, which had no mysterious quality, but his complete lack of ordinary ambition. It was as though he did not speak the same language as the soldiers and officials who made up his world.

Somaliland, it seemed, satisfied him; he had been there several years. The truth was that Somaliland was to him the quintessence of Africa. It had all the characteristics of the continent in an extreme form. If Sheringham and Chard knew something of his feeling towards it, assuredly they had not guessed what other passion went with it. Ten years of his life in Africa Dane had spent learning one lesson, that of self-control. The result was that none of those who marked his mild bearing, his extravagant consideration for animals, and his submission to authority, guessed that he was capable of an insurgent hatred that possessed him as men were said to be possessed of devils.

The hatred was for the men who thwarted his work. He had an invincible confidence in the exclusive rightness of his own policy. But never had he known such a possession of hatred as now. Of the group opposed to him it passed over the Secretary and the Governor, learning in time to find its single object in the Colonel. Cavell, he knew now, if not the brain, was the driving force of the opposition. Cavell was an incarnate negation of his own character. There were times when he came back at night after talking to the Colonel, drinking or eating with him, complimenting him upon his ponies, smiling at his wife, that he lay upon his bed, biting the bed-linen in the effort to wrench himself out of the power of the agony of hate that filled him. Then suddenly the devil would be laid; the picture of the smiling, exquisite face asking to be struck—smashed into annihilation—would vanish, and their would be Sappho, the cheetah, yawning and purring under his hand, and his own clear will in control, saying: "Keep your grip, you damned fool! Don't degrade yourself to his beast level." Then he would go to bed and to sleep with a fugitive thought dying away in his

drowsy mind, "Even now, so do the wicked flourish, while you're alone, always alone, he has a white golden-haired woman in his arms. She'll kiss him to sleep; they'll wake together in the morning. When he kisses her she will smile and close her eyes. Her hair will be tangled about his throat. That's the reward he gets after the life he's lived. I know his life. I know him. I know him down to the bottom of his heart." Then sleep would come and with the morning the morning's thoughts, food to eat, orders to give, and the long, hot day's work.

VIII

EVER since Rhona first thrilled to the news that she was to come out to Somaliland, she had been laying up for herself a store of disillusionment. She postponed her disappointment in successive stages. She had refused to be disappointed with the voyage —that was a mere prelude ; or with Berbera—that was an unfortunate interval. She bore up against the shock of her husband's cool greeting—that was the result of her own folly. She concentrated all her hopes upon Hargeisa : life there was to be the climax of expectation.

The disillusionment was slow, and she beat it off, eagerly blaming her own inadequacies. The bungalow, a little whitewashed mud building, with a small veranda, sitting-room, two bedrooms, kitchen and stores at the back, stood at a place where the river-bed suddenly turned. The outer angle made a high steep bank. From the height of this cliff a short view could be had up and down the wide nullah, but on the banks it was soon muffled by the trees.

Her first trouble was the loneliness. Her husband was up early and before breakfast rode the quarter-mile to the Rifles' camp across the river-bed to parade. Almost immediately afterwards he was gone again. He would come back late to lunch and sleep until tea-time. Then came a short spell together, riding or shooting, too often cut short by a return to inspect stables or other duties. Except for one night of the week, when he went across to the Mess, he dined with her, and the evening was always the crown of her day.

So long as she had the house to decorate she was blissfully busy. She painted and sewed and contrived. She made cushions hung pictures, manufactured lamp-shades, and had her reward in amazing even Cavell, who had hoped for great transformations at her hands. She got extraordinary results out of her cook, an aged man, who fortunately understood English. The meal were served with a daintiness that not even the grossest subaltern could ignore.

But when the work in the house was done and the novelty of the place wore off, Rhona found the loneliness stark. Cavell had not warned her of this. Busy himself, he could not understand how long the hours were that she spent alone. She had no need to make clothes, the literature at her command was limited, and all activities become paralysed when you have the sense of almost infinite time in which to achieve them.

The long mornings tried her most. As the slow hands of the clock crept around from nine to half-past one, the sun reared up in the sky, the sand in the river-bed turned to steel, the thorns and the aloes were still, as if cowering under their tormentor. The boys, with their *tobes*, or body-cloths, wrapped about their heads, snored in the shade of the storehouse. An endless series of such mornings stretched away before her.

On the twentieth morning, at eleven o'clock, she flung herself down on her bed and wept with the desolation. Then she sat up and cursed herself for her own cowardice. If she hadn't the grit to be the wife of a man like Cavell and sustain the honour of facing frontier-life with him, all that remained was to develop it. When he came back she was all smiles, and day by day she bit back the querulous word, the confession of loneliness, and built her whole life upon his needs.

Unfortunately his needs were limited. He was self-contained and altogether efficient. Even his clothes were beyond any need of her service ; he had a perfectly-trained boy and had long learned to organise his life completely under African conditions. There were no black moods to be charmed away ; no irritations to be soothed. He was successful and content. Rhona had filled a last need. Sure of himself and her, he had no doubt that he had chosen wisely. When they dined alone his eyes hardly left her as she sat at table. He watched her white arms moving above the dishes, and the coloured lamplight running across her hair and down her face and throat. He showed a peremptory interest in her frocks ; one night she must wear blue, another white, most often low-cut black ; some he dismissed altogether. This she must keep for him, another for the night when there were guests.

He would come in when she was dressing her hair and seize her in his arms with a roughness that frightened and pleased her. He would make her sit upon the bed and would take her hair and play with it, plaiting it and pressing it in handfuls against his face, he would whisper :

" Is it mine, Rhona ? Have you given it to me ? Have you given yourself to me ? Would you let me strangle you with

it—like this? You are beautiful, my darling, beautiful! You are so white and delicate. Are you mine, Rhona, my wife, my woman?"

At those times she trembled, afraid, and not knowing how to answer. Once she said suddenly, not meaning to say it:

"Don't, Jack. I can't bear it. I'm not made like you—I don't understand you. Can't you see that I don't know how to answer you when you're like this? It isn't that I don't love you enough, but I love you differently. I suppose I'm cold. I love you most of all by day, but you love me——"

But he laughed and kissed her, without letting her finish, and she kept her thoughts unspoken, a thing which, hard at first, was becoming a habit.

Once or twice a week, but generally upon her own initiative, she would go riding or shooting with one of the officers. Sometimes with great difficulty she got them talking freely, but in spite of this she made no headway.. They were as evasive and as aloof as ever when she met them again. She realised that to them she was always the wife of the O.C., and every word spoken to her must be considered. She was also the one woman in their world, therefore a danger-point. That she was young and charming made her doubly dangerous; they seemed banded to ignore this.

Durell she despised. She considered him gross and a buffoon. His jokes were not always in the best of taste, and the wonderful powers of facial expression by which he could keep the Patrol in roars of laughter without a word spoken, was hardly an accomplishment to appeal to her.

Rankin would hardly speak to her. Her presence made him more lowering and stormy than ever. Knowing his own difficulty in meeting women in any half-way house, he, wisely perhaps, kept her at a vast distance. Cheetham, Newsome, and Grainger had decided apparently, that the O.C.'s wife must not be regarded as a woman at all. Deliberately blinding themselves to golden hair, fine brows, and the friendly probing of bronze-coloured eyes, they treated her as an institution, with respect and utter inhumanity.

The only remaining officer, Dyble, understood camels, but had no pretensions to being a gentleman. Remained Jackson, who most nearly approached her. Being independent of the Rifles, he was less upon the defensive, but she, in her turn, with memories of Blaker, was careful to curb the youth in her which called to the youth in him.

Major Dane called the second evening, but she was not

interested in him. Beyond an unanalysed thought that he made her think of a doctor, she did not consider him at all. After all, there was nothing to be learnt about him ; Cavell had told her all.

During the first few weeks in Hargeisa, Rhona went out with her husband and others when they were shooting. From her childhood up Rhona had been unable to kill anything. On these first shooting trips she managed to evade all sight of death. By lagging behind, by looking away at the last moment, she went through with it, shuddering at the sound of every shot. This, she knew, could not continue. Dining on the game, she quite realised that she was contemptible. She called it to herself an illogical squeamishness, and, remembering her husband's words about a man's country, swore to discipline herself in this hard thing.

Therefore, one day after Cavell had ridden away to the camp she picked up the light rifle he had put aside for her use and went out into the ten o'clock sunlight. The house was encircled by tall barbed-wire fences, and she was not supposed to go beyond them without an armed escort, always on duty at the bungalow. But she gave herself a hundred yards' grace just beyond the fences, and so went out alone. She had already practised two or three times at targets with Jackson and was, naturally, a good shot. She had not gone fifty yards before she saw a dove, of which there were large numbers in Hargeisa, sitting upon a low thorn branch. She dared not look for more than a moment, because she knew if she did she would conceive an affectionate interest in the bird. She shot hurriedly. The bird started, fluttered, and came lopsidedly to the ground, where it stumbled in circles. For a moment Rhona closed her eyes, then she ran forward. At her approach the dove lay still, as if trusting her, and looked up, opening and shutting its white-lidded eyes. The beautiful plumage was in disarray, she could see the rippling movements behind the neck-feathers.

" I've got to kill you," she whispered, faced for the first time with this hideous task, to be done at close quarters and in cold blood. Groping for the bird, all her flesh creeping with horror, she seized it and flung it against the ground. The tail feathers came out in her hand and the blow failed. In an agony of compassion, wild to put an end to the tortured life, she seized the bird again and again, flinging it upon the ground. Each thud sickened her as if she herself had endured it. At last it was over. The heavy lids were closed and the little claws curled limp and cool against her fingers.

She realised, when she had got home, that she had taken the gracious little life in vain. One dove was no use to the cook. She wondered if it had a mate. Had she not heard that doves, like dik-dik, were faithful? She buried the bird in the sand.

When Cavell came home for lunch, she tried to tell him something of her feelings, but almost at the first word he laughed, teasing her, and fastening upon the incident as a delicious joke. She choked down her anger, telling herself: "He's right, he's right, you're just maudlin; you've got to go on doing it until you get callous."

She therefore went out a few days later, with her soft lips in a firm line, Hassan carrying the rifle, and walked away from the river-bed. Suddenly the boy gave a low whistle, Two dik-dik were scuttling away, zig-zagging round the thorn trees. The boy whistled again, and the one behind stopped with a suddenness that seemed impossible and looked back. For a moment the little creature stood like a statue, taut neck, alert, arrested. Rhona fired, and instantly it fell forward upon one knee and began to scramble forward upon its breast. She fired again, and this time one hind leg shot away; the buck rolled over but still frantically urged itself forward.

"Quickly, quickly," she cried in Somali, and, putting down the rifle, pressed her fingers over her eyes and ears. There was silence a moment, then she looked up. Hassan was at her side grinning, and the little buck hung with bloody throat from his hand; the beautiful eyes, the exact colour of her own, were not yet glazed. She stroked the dry bristling fur of its back, speckled like the quills of a porcupine. Seen like this it was such a tiny clean creature, perfect in every detail from its gallant little horns to its delicate cloven feet. She shuddered with loathing of herself, of the pitiless science of her weapon, of the smiling boy. "It's like murdering a baby," she thought.

But Cavell guessed nothing of this when he came back to lunch, for she stood on the veranda, waving gaily down to the point where he came into view across the river-bed. He was on foot, and beside him another man. She watched them approaching through the midday heat. Cavell's companion came stooping, slouching a little, but with his head thrown back, and his helmet tilted to the back of it. Walking like this, hands in pockets, shirt open, shorts and puttees shabby and faded, it was not difficult to name him. Rhona unconsciously changed her expression.

"Hullo, darling!" Cavell took her hand and slipped his other round her waist. "Here's Major Dane very kindly offered to come and advise us about our garden."

"Good morning." She gave him an uncordial smile. "It's always morning to me until we've had lunch. Well, what do you think of it?"

They stood looking at the sixty square yards of sand enclosed by barbed wire.

"The difficulty, of course," said Dane, "is water. All your water is brought from the wells by prisoners. You might, of course, sink a well at the foot of the cliff, but it would have to be very deep. It's a bad place. I don't see how you can afford flowers."

"Afford?" repeated Rhona, frowning.

"Afford the water."

"But you have flowers."

"Yes, but I am giving them all up, so that I can have all the water for my new plantation. Even so, I shall have to use every drop of waste water in the house from the kitchen and the bathroom."

"Then," said Rhona, who found this rather trying, "you've really come to tell us we ought not to have a garden at all?"

"No, Mrs. Cavell, I've come to ask you if I might put a garden of my own kind round your house and under your care. If you would look after some trees and vegetables for me, you would be doing something very useful, and you'd find it extremely interesting."

"I don't think I should find vegetables either companionable or decorative. What do you think, Jack?"

"I think Dane has rather let me down over this," he said with a pleasantness so false that it made a difficult pause.

"Well," said Rhona, "let's leave the garden for the moment. I've got something to shew you. I'm so proud of myself. Wait a minute." She ran to the door of the bungalow and called. Her boy came out with the dik-dik. "Look, Jack, what I've done this morning. Isn't that fine?" The boy laid the crumpled, leggy little body at her feet. Dane did not notice that she did not look at it. He was too busy frowning at the creature himself.

Cavell kissed her.

"Bravo, little woman!" he said, "good for you. We'll celebrate the event. Better come in and have dinner to-night, Dane."

"Thanks," said Dane, still staring at the buck. "I don't think I will, though."

"Why not? You can't pretend you have any other engagement."

" No," said Dane, suddenly straightening up and facing them. (" How green his eyes are ! " thought Rhona.) " All the same—walk a few yards back with me. I want to speak about something."

Rhona stood as, without a word to her, Dane walked away with her husband. There was nothing to be learned from the khaki backs, and yet—there was something. She went into the house. When Cavell came, he was alone. She noticed his expression.

" He can't stop us having a garden," she began.

" It isn't the garden," he said. His voice was most quiet when he was most angry. " We'll have our garden right enough. It's about the dik-dik you shot."

" But what——"

" I haven't a licence out yet for you, and it's still the close season. He's going to fine you fifty rupees."

" Jack ! I never knew. I'd no idea."

" Of course you hadn't."

" Is he in the right ? "

" My dear, I don't think that in any station in the Empire you'd find a man who'd do it, under the circumstances."

" It seems abominable."

" It would be the work of an outsider to enforce it against a man. Against you—it's the work of an underbred jack-in-office. However, his motive is obvious."

" What is that ? "

" Just an act of petty spite against me. However, they'll know what I think of it in Berbera when the record of the fine goes through."

" I'm sorry about it."

" No need to be sorry, darling. It's he that will be sorry in the end."

Meanwhile, Dane was walking home, sick with himself for what he had done. Small revenges were not in his line. He had paid a bitter act of homage to his principles. " Was it worth while ? " he asked himself. " The atmosphere between us was bound to be cold. It needn't have been poisonous." More than that, the interview had left an unpleasant picture upon his mind, a fair girl boasting over the body of a little buck. Her first trophy ! Rather absurd in him to grudge it her after the continuous destruction he had dealt out to African creatures. But there was Sappho lolloping out to meet him, fine-drawn stringy beast that she was. She arched singing round his knees, and he went in to lunch determined to banish the incident from his thoughts.

In the Court that afternoon he found himself reflecting. "How does one draw out poison in human relations? (For a straight fight I don't mind.) I think I understand the psychology of native women, but I'm all at sea with the whites!"

Rhona thought about psychology more than once during the week, but not with reference to Dane, who existed merely as a contemptible annoyance.

She had been three months in Hargeisa, a vast period in the first year of marriage. She was still gallantly adhering to her resolution, taken in Berbera, to submit herself to her husband. But in following this path she came about once in three days upon awkward little stiles to be got over. It was no good looking at them and speculating about them. The only thing to do was to close your eyes and take them at a run.

For example, there were the two incidents connected with the trousers and a little talk about Rhona's uncle. They seemed small enough in themselves, but, then, no outsider can have any scale of values about the significance of incidents in married life.

First in time came the conversation about her uncle. Cavell did not know Lord Alverley very well. His father, long since dead, had been a friend of the great man, who had invited him to his house for a few days for old association's sake.

"Rhona," said Cavell one day, when, coming in, he found her at her writing-table, "have you answered your uncle's letter yet?"

"I don't believe I have. Why?"

"You ought to answer. It came two weeks ago."

"Oh, Uncle John won't mind. He knows me."

Cavell stopped a moment to think out his reply.

"That's a foolish answer, dear. You seem to imagine that, for some reason I can't quite fathom, you are above all the little forms and ceremonies that we lesser people have to observe. Your uncle is not a man to be kept waiting seven weeks for an answer."

"But, Jack, he and I understand each other. We're pals. If I kept him waiting six months he'd only laugh and say, 'What a lazy little devil Rhona is!' See, you solemn old thing?"

"I wish you to write this mail, Rhona. That's all."

Rhona said nothing: she had almost prolonged the conversation by asking him why. But she did not ask him, for a reason which she refused to discuss with herself.

Then there was the incident of the trousers.

It began with Cavell tearing himself against a thorn. He was riding along the bank rather absent-mindedly, and he

scratched his knee and also tore a three-cornered cut in the khaki drill trousers he was wearing. They were quite new, and in the afternoon, when he was gone out again, Rhona worked hard at them. By tea-time she had mended the tear so skilfully that it was all but invisible. She came dancing on to the veranda with them when he came in to tea, radiant at being able to prove to him for the first time her capacity in so housewifely a direction.

"Look!"

"What's the matter, dear?"

"You just try and find the tear."

"Silly goose!" he laughed. "Don't tell me you've been wasting time on those things."

"It's not wasted. They're as good as new."

"My dear child, I shouldn't think of wearing them again."

"Jack, you're ridiculous about clothes." She was absurdly distressed because he would not even look at her work. "As if it matters what you wear in the bush! Look at Major Dane!"

"I have done so for two or three years, unfortunately. And for many more years I've managed to look after my own clothes without needing anyone else's advice."

"Now you're being a beast."

"And you're being a baby. My darling child, you've never had to economise about clothes. Why try and force these mean little shifts on me?"

"It wasn't a matter of economy," she said, turning away.

"You can present them to Hassan with my compliments," he called after her.

This was not the end of the incident.

Rhona, recovering her spirits by much the same process as a jaded horse may be made to recover its speed, thought of a better use for the condemned garments than giving them to Hassan.

She had found her riding breeches and boots hot and heavy wear in the burning heat. She noticed that most of the officers wore shorts or khaki slacks for riding. After a little slashing and sewing, she prepared a surprise for Cavell. Having arranged to meet him outside the Camp after he had been to stables, she went to the rendezvous in her new gear. She had managed, by tying two mirrors together, to produce a passable full-length glass, and she had seen, before setting out, that the new garments became her excellently. She laughed, turning round, and

clapping her hands with joy at the charming, slender boy who responded to her in the mirror. She sat astride her pony under a thorn-tree, gurgling with laughter in anticipation of the moment when Cavell would see her.

He came at last. She saw him catch sight of her head and smile, then he took in the whole picture. His face darkened with anger; he bit his lips. She saw for the first time the violence that quiet voice and manner disguised. He rode up to her.

"You will go straight home and change."

"Jack, don't be silly. Don't look at me in that absurd way! What's the harm?"

"I don't wish my wife to be a good joke in the M.R. Mess."

"Jack, you're absurd! What's the difference between these and my riding-breeches? Out here in the wilds! Why, I've worn them at Chantrey before now. They're so comfortable, too."

"You heard what I said."

For a moment her eyes blazed back at him. She could have struck the cold, set face with her riding-whip. Then she gulped back the surging words, and, scarlet with humiliation and anger, galloped back to the bungalow.

Half an hour later she was still sitting on the edge of her bed, her head bowed as if weighted by the low-hanging hair, dressed only in her silken vest. She was arguing with herself.

"Be sensible, Rhona dear. Don't give way to silly temper. It's only a little thing. It may seem silly of him, but it's all because he loves you, really; and he's so sweet, most of the time. You said you'd do what he told you. It doesn't really matter to you either way, and it seems to matter to him. So try and smile when he comes in, and try not to mind feeling humiliated. I expect it's awfully good for you."

As for the other things which puzzled, she knew it was not wise to start brooding about them. If she had had a mother, she would have been given excellent answers to all her questions. Was it Cavell who had once remarked that in some ways women were like horses? She supposed that, like horses, they had to be broken in, and if they fretted against the process, they had better wear blinkers, as they had somehow to get along the road of life without perpetually rearing and shying, which was so embarrassing for all the rest of the traffic.

So she evolved in time a little series of rules. She could see them in her mind's eye, written out in illuminated lettering and framed, like the rules on the dormitory wall at her school.

I. Try not to be too feminine. Don't make friction over little things. Just give in; and after you've given in, don't brood about it. Be boyish and friendly with him.

II. Remember that he does the work while you do nothing, and that, therefore, he's entitled to peace and kindness, and can't be expected to understand all the little trifles that worry you while you're alone.

III. He's the most magnificent man in Somaliland, and you're a very lucky girl to possess him. He's so magnificent that he can be allowed quite a lot of faults in small ways.

IV. Remember that he's a man, and men are rather stupid and blundering creatures. We're so very quick and clever that it isn't really fair to take advantage of them.

V. And always remember that first night at Berbera, and the compact you made.

So the little incidents came and went, and Cavell smiled to himself, calculating her weakness in his hands, and reckoning upon an ever-growing ascendancy.

IX

DANE was just turning out of his garden, with a fatherly glance at his favourite plant, when Jackson rode up with a cheery good morning.

"Going to the office?"

"Likely enough."

"Sorry. I'm always saying wooden-headed things like that in the morning. May I have a word with you?"

"Yes, if you'll get off that pony."

"Sorry again." Jackson dismounted.

"Lurgeh!" Dane's attendant policeman took the pony. 'Well, Jackson?" But Jackson was silent.

They walked on. Under a large, bare tree by the river-bed nearly a score of middle-aged men were squatting in a circle, talking quietly. They looked up and caught the eyes of the two white men as they passed.

"Look at that, Major," said Jackson. He seemed glad to have found a topic. "There's the mullah, Sheikh Abdullah. I'm sure he's a bad influence. They never stand up now when I pass."

"Since the Rifles came," thought Dane, but he did not say it, nor that it was the first time that he had met with such disrespect. "Wait a minute." He walked across the few yards to the group. One by one, awkwardly, they rose from their squatting, all except the priest. There was a long silence. Then Dane said in Somali:

"Stand up, Sheikh Abdullah."

The mullah made a lightning quest with his eyes for support, but no man looked at him. He stood up. Dane turned to the others.

"This man is not a good priest. Where is your own priest, your kathi and the good mullahs of Hargeisa, that you listen to a stranger? Is this why you sit like dogs or beggar children, who know no better, when your Hakim Sahib passes? I thought

you were people of substance and standing—Yes, *you* Jama Hirsi, and *you*, Ali Nasri—and knew the ways of big men."

To Jackson, watching, the group stared back, dignified, imperturbable. To him every Somali face was a mask, and inscrutable to exasperation.

Dane made no reference to the incident as they walked on towards the Court, and Jackson began nervously to talk of his own affairs.

"I say, Major, what is H.E. going to do about Zeila?"

"I don't know any more than you. Why?"

"They say in the Mess that this new man, Bouldon, will go to Burao. Sanderson at Zeila is going on leave almost at once."

"Oh! And what else do they say?"

"That's all. I suppose it means sending a D.P.O. for a term to Zeila."

"Yes."

"Well then, in that case, would you . . . could you—I mean is there any chance of my getting recommended?"

"You're very young, Jackson. It's a remote station."

"It's a step up. If I don't go, I suppose it will be young Blaker. There's no difference between us in seniority."

"No." They walked on in silence for a minute. "You want me to recommend you, if the question arises."

"If you could, Major. That is, if you feel you can. It isn't that I want to leave you. I've enjoyed working with you, but it's such a chance. I want to get into the administration if I can, you know."

Dane glanced at him. Jackson was tall and fair, and now his face, both shy and eager, looked very young, and its youth was attractive. Beside it he set Blaker's face. Dane loved Blaker, and he wished with all his heart that it had been the dark, young face that looked at him, lit with ambition and desire for the hard task. For Blaker was one of the elect. He understood why Dane was planting trees, and hated Colonel Cavell. Nothing could have suited Dane's policy better than to have had Blaker at Zeila, yet he prayed from the bottom of his heart that Blaker might never go there. So he said to Jackson:

"I am writing a report upon your work, and I'll do my best for you. I think you know the police have been a bit slack lately, but I know what you can do, and if you are keen to go to Zeila it probably means that you will do well there."

"Oh, thank you, Major, you are a brick."

"Oh, you wait before you start thanking me. I'm not God

Almighty in this country, not by a long way." They were at the door of the Court House. Jackson left him.

The low, white building stood in the sand of a clearing. All round it, courting the fringe of what shade there was, the Somals, men and women, squatted or stood, or walked about in twos or threes, waiting for the Hakim Sahib. In silence they saluted him as he passed.

The Somal is a nomad. Up and down that dessicated country, all life long, he wanders with his flocks—camels, oxen, sheep and goats—in search of sustenance. Wiry creatures are they, man and beast alike, and pass their lives on the edge of starvation. Organised rigidly into tribes and the sections of tribes, each group has its grazing area, and is responsible collectively for the behaviour and the protection of its members. There is, therefore, little permanent population at any of those centres the English call towns and villages. At Hargeisa there was always an untidy encampment, varying in size according to the season. With time and the establishment of a District Commissioner, however, a small permanent group had settled in the town with their stores—workers in leather and metal, mullahs and traders. Here came the akils, representatives of the sections, selected and paid by the Government, to answer for their tribesmen to the Commissioner. The Court was the centre of life at Hargeisa. It combined in itself all the public-house, the picture-palace and variety-show, the club, library and daily paper can offer to the English citizen.

Dane, passing through a minute office, where a couple of Indian clerks stood up from their desks, entered the Court, a room about the size of a tennis lawn. At one end was a railed platform, on which were a desk and some chairs. A huge policeman, with a head like an American president, stood in the body of the hall. To him Dane made a sign, and stooped to examine some documents handed to him by one of the clerks.

Instantly the Somals began to file in through two doors, piling their great spears and knives in the corner as they came. When Dane looked up, the hall was packed. Every inch of the floor was hidden by the squatting men, others stood in close rank against the walls, choked the doorways or filled the windows.

In spite of the crowd the room was cool. The roof was padded with camel grass which hung between the rafters in dark beards. There was no taint of humanity in the air. The men, in person and clothes, were all clean and *soignés*. They were handsome, too, even by European standards. There was nothing negroid here : heads were held high, brows were deep, faces oval ; there

were aquiline noses moulded to perfection, long and fine limbs. Here and there were features that would have made marked men of their owners in England. Paint out the bronze of some of the older men, and you have the replica of an English dean or a retired admiral.

On Dane's right, beside the rail, sat the lawyer-priest, the Kathi, dressed in a French pepper-and-salt overcoat with a velvet collar. Heaven knows how it got there! It was by far the most civilised garment in the room. On a wooden box to the right of the desk sat Ismael the interpreter, with a face more Cockney in form than African, five and a half feet of bright-eyed intrigue. Beyond him were two chiefs, aged and bony men. They sat with the gravity that became their patriarchal state, one holding his beads, the other a water-bottle. They had an air of calm and strength that was little evidence of the life of hardness and savage competition through which they had endured. Lurgeh, erect behind Dane's chair, was the only other occupant of the platform.

From the floor there was no obvious stir as Dane looked up, such as a Western audience might have made, but every single eye was slowly turned and fixed upon him. Looking back into the crowded eyes, the white man met no shadow of sympathy. It is not so that the most hostile or ignorant Western eyes exchange their glance; there is communication, of whatever kind it be. Here there was none. Dane met a sustained gaze that held neither question nor answer.

No such thought was in the head of the District Commissioner. If there was one place where Dane felt the supreme unself-consciousness that only confidence can give, it was sitting in judgment in front of just such a watchful crowd, before which so many hours of his life had been passed. Nor did he dwell upon another fact of which he was well aware, that many of the men whose eyes he was now meeting had worked for his murder not many weeks before. He had been so long in Africa that the event had bitten no impression into his mind, nor changed a whit his feelings towards the people under his charge.

The business began. The Hakim Sahib was all but king of his domain, judge in every case, and agent of all duties of Government, from the counselling of chieftains to the lowest acts of poor relief or postal service. The heterogeneous procession came on—burglary in an Arab store, payment of fine to the Government in camels, financial assessment of a wound, a hen-pecked husband's application for divorce, the changing of a money-order, the registration of a rifle, the question of an

unpaid dowry, the murder of a camel-herd in the bush, a religious controversy outside the mosque. Monotonously the interpreter swore the litigants upon the Koran, then came question and answer, bright-eyed Ismael turning and twisting upon the box; often lie upon lie as the unperturbed prisoners, staring across the rails at Dane, were driven by his questions from one position to another.

Dane, his interpreter and his audience all seemed tireless. The hot morning through, quietly, without a moment's intermission, they concentrated upon the business. Dane seemed able to bring a fresh mind to each case; no maze of lies was too intricate for his pursuit of truth; his sentences, and they were hard ones, were given with an assurance almost sublime.

When it was long after noon, Dane rose to go. Instantly a group of Somals, watching from beyond the doorway, walked into the court. They were all big men in the Hargeisa district, mullahs, chiefs and akils, and even the policeman stepped back from the door before the tall and brilliantly-dressed group. They approached the rail with the bearing of Spanish grandees.

"Salaam aleikum!" said Dane.

"Aleikum salaam!" they replied.

"You here, Haji Aden!" said Dane in English, and the young chief replied by holding out his hand for the Commissioner to shake, and replying:

"Sahib, I have to-day rode to Hargeisa all the half journey from Burao."

Aden was a tall man, very slender in build, with straight, fine features and a high forehead from which a great mass of hair, elaborately curled and oiled, swept back to droop upon his shoulders.

Dane considered the others—Sheikh Abdullah and two other mullahs, with coloured handkerchiefs knotted round their heads; two akils, Yusuf Ali, Aden's uncle, a Habr Awwal warrior, still, noble in a gnarled old age, and two Gadabursi chiefs.

"Well, what is it?" Dane spoke in Somali.

"We have come," said one of the mullahs, "knowing that the Major Sahib is just, to tell him what evil has befallen the Aden Yunis, a section of the Gadabursi, at the hands of Derea Waraba."

Dane, knowing they would begin at the furthest point from their business and gradually converge upon it, tried to hasten the process.

"I know it, Mahomed Hassan. It is the task of the Hakim Sahib to know these things first. Three hundred camels were

stolen with many oxen and goats, and fifteen men were laid upon the ground, and their throats cut like sheep. But you are of the Habr Awwal. Why do you come with news of the Gadabursi ? "

" Because, Sahib, there is brotherhood between——"

Dane cut him short.

" You want to know why the Governor Sahib does not send the Rifles against Derea. Because the Aden Yunis were beyond the line drawn between our land and Abyssinia, and had themselves seized there the village of a peaceful tribe, the Girreh, whom the Gadabursi had long molested."

" Sahib," said Haji Aden, who knew how white men take counsel, " the killing of the Aden Yunis section is a small matter. Sheep they were, and like sheep they died. But we come about a big matter. Many men of the sections on the border, warriors and men of substance, afraid of the Abyssinian soldiers and of the Gadabursi, have taken service with Derea Waraba."

" That is also true," said Dane. It was the first he had heard of it.

Now the discussion seemed to go off at a tangent. Aden's uncle spoke in a deep, slow voice.

" Many years have passed, Major Sahib, since first the headmen of my tribe met the sahibs from the big ship at Bulhar. My father did not believe what the white men told us, offering us protection and good government. He said weak men make promises in order that some day they may be strong enough to break them. But we agreed, and many years later Chard, the Burra Sahib, made peace between the Habr Awwal and the Gadabursi, and then made promises to the Gadabursi also. What were these promises, Sahib ? That we should be defended from the further tribes who are our enemies, and that we should have good trade with our cattle and skins, and be rich. And that medicine-men should heal our sick and make us strong, and that all our laws and customs should be kept by the Serkal for ever."

" Why do you tell me all this, Yusuf Ali ? Go to the Burra Sahib with all this talk of government and promises."

Now Sheikh Abdullah spoke, and Dane turned to him. He was a strong but voluptuous-looking creature. He was exotic, and there was an air of romance about him as if he had stepped from the pages of the "Arabian Nights." His face was oval and ended in a tiny, pointed, black beard. He had great, gentle, almond eyes ; his hair, curled and oiled like an Assyrian's, was bound by a chain of steel beads from which purple and yellow

tassels fell across one ear. Dane knew him. He had figured in a particularly atrocious murder case, having been accused of beating his wife to death, but there had not been enough evidence to convict him. Dane's instinct told him the man was false, and he suspected him of dealings with the more rebellious sections of the Gadabursi.

" Well, Sheikh Abdullah ? "

The man spoke with deprecating gentleness.

" The Burra Sahib will not hear our voices. Haji Aden, whom Chard many times talked with in his house, is treated like a dog by Page."

" I have no ears for talk like that, Abdullah, nor for a man who does not know how to speak of a white chief."

" Sahib, may I speak ? " said Aden.

Dane considered. It was bad work for him to hear and to report to Page grievances to which the Governor refused to listen himself. Yet, behind his unconcerned manner, he hid an added fear as to the seriousness of the situation. Did Sir Lionel understand ? His first instinct was to assume that he did, but he caught himself out there in the unworthy wish to see the Governor's policy discredited and his own established. He had more real interests than that to serve. He glanced at the men, estimating their truculence, their general ignorance of what men like Chard and himself could and would do for them. He must run the risk of his chief's misinterpretation and learn more of their troubles.

" Speak, Aden," he said.

" Sahib, it is not against *you* the Somals talk in Hargeisa and all the way to Berbera. You are the lion-sahib, brave and just. But this new Burra Sahib, who would take away our rifles, does not know how a big sahib like Chard talks to Somals, who are also big men. He does things not known before in Somaliland. Last week some Habr Awwal men coming into Berbera put up their huts near the walls of your shaab, knowing no better, and he saw them and burned them, with their water-skins and the hides they had bought to sell and two pairs of sandals. Now may the mullahs have no procession in Berbera. Not only that. The Colonel Sahib has seized all the grazing on both sides of the river-bed from here to Haleyah for his camels and ponies, the best grazing round Hargeisa that always belonged to my section. Furthermore, round the wells in the bed beyond the camp, that have always been used for the flocks coming through the passes, has he built a white wall, and this, he says, is by order of the Burra Sahib."

" All this I know, and for all of it the Burra Sahib has good reason. That is not all you have to say. Why have these men of the Gadabursi come in ? "

He turned to them. Unlike their companions, they wore their hair in a startling, unkempt shock. Their tattered tobes hardly covered their loins and one shoulder, and there was about them an air at once wild and shy. One of them spoke, but almost too quickly for Dane to follow, and the Sheikh Abdullah interpreted with a lazy smile.

" He says, Sahib, that the Gadabursi in his part are hard pressed by Derea Waraba, who says he will serve them all, as he served the Aden Yunis section, unless they join with him, that together they may raid the Habr Awwal, who, he says, are fat and rich and have good women."

The other man from the bush spoke quickly, and Dane caught his meaning here and there. Derea had sent word to them that they were cowards, and no true sons of Islam to cringe to half a score of white men, who treated them like dogs and never raised a hand to help them. Better fight with Derea who knew well how to treat friends and how to treat enemies too, and would turn the Somals from a nation of jackals to a nation of lions, if they would follow him.

So much Dane made out. Such talk was the commonplace of life on his frontier station, and under ordinary circumstances he would have dismissed it without a thought.

" If," said Yusuf Ali, " the Rifles, for which we pay with our cattle tax, are not to be used for our help, why, then, are they to be made more ? "

Dane was startled and silent. He had too great a respect for the native intelligence service to deny what was quite new to him, and too much knowledge of the Somal to ask questions. For a moment he sat in silence, thinking out what he should say, untroubled by all the keen eyes fixed upon him. Then he stood up and spoke in the quiet, reasonable manner which he did not keep for his own race.

" As for your small complaints—bring them each to the proper place, and they shall be settled there. As for all this talk of the new Burra Sahib and of the Colonel—are you men of understanding or mere simple men of the bush, believing tales and lies of any mischief-maker ?

" You are men with heads on your shoulders, who govern tribes, and have seen more of life than flocks and herds. The servants of the British Government change : one is short and one is tall ; one talks and the next is silent. But the British

Government does not change. Only fools and liars say it. The British are here for your good, to help and protect you, to guard the peaceful, and punish the men who make war and break the laws. For this the Rifles are your servants and our servants, the servants of all who wish peace and prosperity. And this I can promise you. If Derea, or any other robber, attacks a tribe under our protection and within our borders, the Rifles will go out against him. Go to your sections both in the Gadabursi and Habr Awwal and put an end to all this girl's chatter and whispering in corners. That is all. Close the court Ismael."

X

THE Hargeisa mail came first to the District Commissioner, who divided his own correspondence from that of the M.R., which he sent on across the river-bed. As the policeman saluted and backed off the veranda with the mail-bag, Dane looked down at the only unofficial letter that had come to him. It was from Blaker.

"DEAR DANE,

"The blow has fallen. I am for Zeila, and may the Lord have mercy on my soul and those of my enemies, as Sheringham would say. I dare not think it is not too late, but if help may not come out of Hargeisa, I know it will not be your fault. Have you sounded Jackson?

"I am coming, as one bound to the chariot wheels, with the Governor on his safari to Hargeisa next week. A night is all I have there to pick up a few police and on by this circuitous route to Zeila.

"You are going to do a favour for me which you will not like doing. For once, suspend judgment. I shan't ask much more of you. Give the enclosed letter to Mrs. Cavell, and forget what you may have heard concerning us.

"I shall see you at Hargeisa about Friday. For the love of God, don't be out on patrol. You can imagine what pleasant travelling companions H. E. and I will make!

"*Á bientôt!*

"G. B."

Dane read the letter through again and then sat wondering, with his head on his hands, if by any desperate measure he could yet save his friend. He saw the danger so clearly, and yet, through no fault of his own, he was powerless. The Governor was automatically blind whenever he wrote—would he become deaf when he spoke! He would know when he met him face

to face. Surely he would find some eloquence upon such a subject to touch his chief! He was Blaker's last hope: better risk any humiliation rather than fail him. It was unfortunate that he had two entreaties to make. One emphasis killed another, and both were equally near his heart.

He sat back in his chair and handled the enclosure. He was disgusted, not with Blaker, but with the Colonel's wife. He had great knowledge of men and great ignorance of women, at least of women of his colour. That most men were predatory was clear enough, but the mere existence of virtue in a woman was enough to keep them at bay. That the Colonel's wife must be wrong-headed or a fool he knew, but he had taken her virtue for granted. He put the letter in his pocket, grimly satisfied that Cavell had built the domestic half of his life upon a false foundation, and set out to play postman.

He found Rhona alone on the veranda, and, as soon as he met her eyes, saw that he was the last person she wished to encounter. For his own part, he had nothing to say to her. Yet talk he must, since our social habits do not allow us to stand and glare our meaning across an afternoon tea-table.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Cavell."

"Good afternoon," she replied coldly. It struck him that she was very stupid to dislike him so much, having none but superficial reasons, and foolish to show it so openly to him. But how could Cavell's wife be a judge of men? Perhaps, after all, he thought, as he appreciated the golden stuff that was all he could see of her bent head, and that was so strange and wonderful in Africa, Cavell had made the bargain he wanted. It was something to possess in one's bungalow, that living sheaf of hair that must surely reach her waist when released. He reflected. He could not teach her to be virtuous, but at least he could punish her for being stupid. He put his hand into his pocket.

"Mrs. Cavell, I have a letter for you."

"For me, Major Dane. I have had my mail, thank you."

"It was not in your mail. It was enclosed in a letter of mine."

"In a letter of yours! I think you are making a mistake." She got up to go. She had to be cold towards this man, but coldness never came naturally to her.

"I don't think so, Mrs. Cavell. Blaker asked me to give it to you, and I thought this was a good opportunity."

The tables were turned and Rhona had no skill to hide it. She was red with shame and anger.

"Blaker!" He waited for her to hold out her hand.

Dane, confirmed in his estimate of her, and quickly tired of such a conflict, drew the conversation into the normal.

"Yes, our friend Blaker is in trouble. I don't know how much it will convey to you when I tell you that he is being sent to Zeila."

"To Zeila!" Coldness was forgotten now. "Oh, but he mustn't go to Zeila! It's out of the question. Couldn't he come here?"

Then she remembered herself, took the letter, and Dane found himself again in the river-bed. In *loco parentis*, he considered deeply whether Hargeisa were much more satisfactory for Blaker than Zeila.

. . . . . .

"Now, Dane," said the Governor, "I can give you just an hour. Plunge straight into your business and tell me frankly what are your ideas and your plans."

The two men were sitting in the Governor's cool, blue-lined durbar-tent on the afternoon of Sir Lionel's arrival at Hargeisa; the early interview was the result of an urgent request by the D. C.

"Here," thought the Governor, "is my opponent—Chard's second self. I must be very careful. He must not think that I feel any resentment against him."

Dane's thoughts were not like this. He did not answer the Governor for a long moment. He felt himself cruelly at a disadvantage in the coming conversation, because it was going to deal with his deepest interests. Merely a matter of rather unpleasant routine to the Governor, it was life and death to him. He called his emotions to order and tried to put cold reason in command. Then he looked up.

"Do you mean with regard to the present situation or my report, sir?"

"Your report?" The Governor's thoughts went questing back through a series of documents, but he could remember nothing of immediate interest from the D. C., Hargeisa. His last report, surely, had been a long dissertation upon irrigation or some kindred subject.

"Why, Dane, you asked for this discussion! It rests with you to raise whatever subject you consider most important."

"Ultimately my schemes for conservation of water are most important, sir, but I have yet to convince you of that. So perhaps I had better tell you something about the district first."

"It's in excellent order, I gather." The Governor headed

straight for the conflict, and incidentally told Dane that he had already, thanks to the Colonel, prejudged the situation.

" Superficially it is in order. But the Gadabursi are getting restive, especially the tribes near the border. This last raid of Derea Waraba's has made a very important impression."

" The Aden Junis section of the Gadabursi, whom he raided, were just beyond our territory. And there was not much to chose between them and Derea as far as raiding is concerned."

This was exactly what Dane himself had said to the chiefs, and, logically, it was a perfect answer, yet he sighed a deep internal sigh. When face to face with this man he could not remember, even though he tried, the opposition between them. It was impossible to believe that the other also could not forget and remember only their common task in Somaliland. But Page had spoken with a satisfaction that betrayed him : was it possible that he thought it more important to score a point off the D. C., Hargeisa, than off Derea Waraba ? How lead a man in this state of mind to face the realities of the situation ?

" On paper," he replied, " our position is irreproachable. But frontiers mean less to them than to us, and, in any case, this has only been the occasion for the expression of general discontent."

The Governor was frowning now. How pertinacious was this Commissioner, and how bold !

" I know," Dane went on," that I lay myself open to the charge of encouraging malcontents, but I considered it my duty, sir, on this particular occasion, to find out what their grievances were." He described his interview in court. " They were all men of position and with a good record, with the exception of Sheikh Abdullah."

The Governor kept silence for a long time before replying.

" I did hope, Dane, that we should be able to talk this over without raising any difficult, general questions. But every small question brings us right back to big ones of policy and principles. I know it is difficult for you, having grown up, as it were, under one régime, to settle down under another. But governors cannot all be alike, and clearly my methods are different from my predecessor's. I don't say better, but different. At least, they are the only ones that I can conscientiously follow. I do not see my way to considering the complaints of individual natives. If we once begin that, we open the way first to intrigue and later to blackmail. We must, having considered all the facts, decide for ourselves and then act continuously and strongly upon that decision. Once the Somal understands that, he will

accept it like any black man the world over. He is just beginning to understand it, but he is not quite sure, and until he is sure, he will try every bluff he knows. After all, Dane, that is the opinion of most of the senior officials in this country, and I am fully convinced now that the policy of treating the Somal as an exceptional kind of native would, in the long run, prove the ruin of Somaliland."

"Sir," said Dane, "I do understand your point of view. Will you, for one moment, try to see mine? I do beg you, at least, to believe that I am sincere. I don't press the contrary view for the sake of opposition, or because I want to cling to a reputation for consistency. The whole business is too serious for that; no man knows better than I how quickly trouble develops in this country, and I believe trouble is brewing. Surely it is better to consider alternatives now, rather than then. I have at least a right to speak of my own district."

"Exactly what do you fear?"

"That the Gadabursi, or sections of them, will join with Derea unless the Government will prove its sincerity by an energetic use of the Rifles against Derea and the smaller fry of border robbers; that both the Gadabursi and the Habr Awwal are being alienated because they believe the Rifles are being kept here simply to overawe them and prepare the way for a seizure of their rifles, about which they have been in suspense ever since the show in the river-bed. There is even a bazaar rumour that the Rifles are to be enlarged."

"Is there?" ("He does'nt deny it," thought Dane). "Of course, Dane, it is no news to me that you would rather see the Rifles anywhere but here. It seems to me that now your district has seen the companies at close quarters, watched manœuvres, heard machine-gun practice, it is likely to remain quiet for a long time, even if the troops were moved. I am very sorry that you and Cavell don't hit it off as well as you should."

This speech all but destroyed Dane's hopes. If this was what the Governor thought of affairs, everything he said would be regarded as tainted by factiousness. He asked stiffly:

"Has he any complaint to make against me, sir?"

"Oh, none whatever. I was speaking quite unofficially. In a small administration like this, it is a pity to have any personal friction."

"My objection to the presence of the M. R. has nothing to do with my private feelings about the Colonel."

"Oh, no, that's quite understood. Is that all, Dane?"

"No, sir; there are two other things I wish to discuss. The

first is of a more personal nature." He hesitated, trying not to let his sense of its hopelessness weaken the force of his appeal " I'm afraid you will think this a piece of unwarranted interference on my part. Only my knowledge of this country and of the individuals concerned can justify me. You have decided to send young Blaker to Zeila."

" Really, Dane——" The Governor broke off. Surely that was enough to silence him.

" Bear with me, sir, for a few minutes. I know Blaker very well, and, of course, I like him. I am absolutely convinced he is not the man to send to a lonely station like Zeila. Zeila is a very trying district, and Blaker has just done a turn at Las Khorai. Chard wanted to try his mettle. He barely stuck it ; he won't stand another. It's not a nice thing to say of a friend, but it's better than to see him go to pieces and make a mess of things. After all, he's very young. Jackson's very young, too, but he's a different type, hard and ambitious, and not imaginative. I think Jackson has the makings of a very fine political officer, given the chance to prove himself. I said so in my report of him. Is it quite impossible, sir, for you to re-consider your decision, and to send Jackson to Zeila, and put Blaker in his place ? Or, at least, if Blaker must go on now, could you change them round fairly soon ? "

The Governor could not relish this interference, but Dane's appeal was too grave to be lightly dismissed. It must be considered, if only that he might find better reasons than he had for sticking to his own course.

" I have heard that Blaker has been slack and indiscreet. But I thought that he had pulled himself up. After all, Chard brought him out here with great hopes. He wants to get into the administration. I was giving him another chance to make good."

" Later, perhaps——" said Dane doubtfully. " But it's rather a difficult time for us in the administration just now."

" Aren't you working back again to a subject we've already dealt with ? " The Governor spoke coldly. " As for Blaker, I'll make a mental note of what you've said, though, I think, in a general way, the political officers should confine themselves to making reports on these matters."

Dane was silent. Another word would make things still worse, and make it impossible for him to do anything else with the Governor.

" Well, Dane, that's all, isn't it ? "

" No, sir ; there's the question of my report."

'Oh, yes, your report. Do you really think the matter so urgent that we must discuss it just now?"

The Governor had had enough and stirred as if to rise.

"I don't mind when you talk to me about it, sir, so long as you do give me a chance to put my case before you go."

"How long will it take?"

"As long as you like, sir."

The Governor shrugged his resignation.

And with this chilling invitation, Dane began what he hoped would be one of the most important conversations of his life. In his nervousness he sounded at first stilted and priggish, as though he had learned his sentences by heart. This, indeed, was not far off the truth, so often, lying awake at night, had he rehearsed his arguments.

"I hope you won't mind if I talk about it in my own way, even if I seem to be a bit ambitious in my schemes. Since I have been here, I have often wondered if we could not transform this empty land to a country rich in fruit and grain. It has always seemed to me that the justification of our presence here is work such as we have done in Egypt. After all, why should not this wretched Somaliland, the curse of the Colonial Office, become a second Egypt?"

"Because, my dear fellow, it lacks one small element of success—the Nile."

"Have we not our potential Nile, sir? When our three months' rainy season begins in May, after nine months of desiccation, what happens?"

"Intermittent storms, floods down the nullahs and the water lost in the sand." The Governor spoke impatiently. Dane, with a chill at heart, saw how badly he had chosen his moment.

"Yes, that's the tragedy of Somaliland—millions of gallons of water racing over the escarpment, precious stuff that, if we could store it, would turn into pasture and crops, cattle and men."

"If—if—if—my dear Dane, *if* it were humanly possible to catch the scanty rainfall, don't you think someone would have thought of it before now? Even if the natives through centuries had never even attempted to conserve, surely forty years of English administration would have done something. You are a soldier, but there have been engineers here before your time."

"I know, I know. Even so I am convinced that I am right, so convinced that if I had a private fortune, I would gamble with it on my scheme. For I have a scheme——"

"And it means a grant. It's impossible. If you could

spend a week in the Treasury and see the administration from another point of view, you'd see that it was impossible. As you know, the Colonial Office has a yearly deficit here, and they watch us like cats."

"I know that, too, sir. But my proposition is for an investment rather than a grant."

"Oh, they all say that! Each man in his own department has the perfect solution for all our troubles—a better system of collection at the Customs; better communications at the Public Works; more police, and you could save on the Rifles; more troops, and you could cut down the police. That's as it should be, but I count it my unpleasant duty to hold a balance between you all."

"Will you listen to my scheme?"

"Is it definite?"

"It's better than that, it's scientific. You tell me I'm a soldier. Is that any reason why I shouldn't take a serious interest in these problems? I assure you I've gone into this thoroughly. My only fear is lest I should become too technical."

The Governor could not silence a man who was looking at him as Dane was looking now.

"Go on."

"Will you come out with me a hundred yards?"

The Governor, marvelling at his own patience, reached for his helmet and went with Dane to his nearest garden.

"This garden does not really illustrate what I want, for it is watered from the wells, as you see. But supposing I chose five hundred acres near the river-bed, on this level plot here, from which there is a gradual slope to the hills. I should make a network of small bunds of earth, two or three feet high, into which, by means of dykes, I should collect the storm-water from several thousands of acres—say, four thousand. I have known half an inch of rain fall here in an hour. I reckon I could collect three, four, or even five inches in my bunds in that time, at a moderate estimate."

"Collect, but how would you keep it? It would quickly evaporate off the caked surface."

"No, I should store it in the earth itself. If the surface were always kept finely tilled, the water would soak in. The amount would be controlled, for we must not waterlog our earth. I have experimented in a very small way with bunds of various kinds, and I am sure it is possible."

"Granted all this—and I don't grant it for a moment—what do you think you could grow?"

" First of all, lucerne, which could be stored against the dry season, sweet potatoes, maize, and, perhaps, beans and barley. Fruit—pineapples, melons, oranges, pomegranates, limes, lemons and custard-apples. Along each side of the bunded areas I should plant trees, both for their own sake and to break the wind—eucalyptus, tamarind and orange. I've studied most of these plants, and experimented on a small scale with some of them."

" It's an extraordinary idea," said the Governor.

" It would turn the valley into a garden," Dane went on. " It is practicable in large areas of this country. It would treble the population, and instead of a deficit you would have an ever-increasing surplus on your revenue accounts, if you wanted it."

The Governor was not wholly without ambition, nor wholly unimpressionable. In Dane's last extravagant picture, he had, for the first time, caught a glimpse of himself. For a moment his head swam with the vision. He saw the valley patched with many-coloured crops, the bitter sand black with life-giving moisture and dotted with toilers, the wind broken and caught in the pale branches of the eucalyptus, and the dark-green orange trees bowed with fruit. Then he glanced at Dane. Forgetting the vision, he took measure of the man and laughed. He caught the angle of his helmet and the disreputable shirt and shorts. Page knew and never forgot that Dane was a fighting man; there was no officer in Somaliland he would rather have had at his side at an awkward moment, but he would allow him nothing else, and it was absurd of Dane to pose suddenly as a scientific authority upon irrigation. Africa and loneliness produce queer effects, but governors can hardly be expected to waste time and money on men who dream dreams.

" It isn't as though I ask much," Dane was saying; " I only want a small grant, say five hundred pounds, to put through an experiment that would prove my case. I have worked out a scheme by which the natives shall co-operate in growing numbers, but they are very conservative, and it will be a slow game. The first step is to prove to Hargeisa that the thing can be done."

" Well, well, it's all very suggestive, Dane." The Governor spoke in a concluding tone of voice. " But it's a question for the experts, not for amateurs like you and me, though your ideas are most interesting, and I shall bear them in mind. Perhaps some day, when things are more settled here——"

" Won't you risk a small grant this year? " It was all Dane could get out in his savage disappointment. But governors

do not like being interrupted, and a moment later Sir Lionel was on his way to another interview; and Dane left, cursing himself for a tactless fool. A moment before a vision more definite and more splendid than the Governor's had appeared to him, and now he saw only the sand and scattered thorn trees, through which an old woman led half a dozen emaciated camels.

"Well, sir, that's my case," said Cavell, a couple of hours later, as he smiled at the Governor, leaned back in his chair and emptied his glass with the air of a man who has deserved it.

"You've put it very well, certainly."

"It puts itself. Chard's refusal to keep the Rifles at full strength was on a line with the rest of his policy. His excuse was that with increased prices the Rifles cost the same now as they did in the early days, and that if he wanted an increased grant he must be able honestly to claim that it was necessary. That, of course, he was unable to do. But now, sir, we cannot afford to go on with an inefficient corps. Not only must I have the reserve camels and ponies, but I must have the full ration for them.

"Dyble insisted before he went on leave that the present allowance is barely over three-quarters of what they should be having, and was willing to get Grady, the camel man, down from Egypt to confirm it. Furthermore, an extra and better brick store-house is essential here, or I won't answer for the ammunition, saddlery, and spare equipment."

"Are you willing to put it down in black and white that, as things are at present, you do not feel the corps is up to its work?"

"Absolutely, sir. Picture what might—probably will happen under present conditions. There is trouble a hundred miles away. Two companies are ordered out; they must be able to move immediately and swiftly to the scene of action. One is sent to hold down any district you consider doubtful. You can't divide the corps at an emergency if it is not up to full strength and if men and animals are not at the top of their form."

"You're very sure of trouble; so is Dane. A nice couple of pessimists you are!"

"Ah! but Dane's anticipations of trouble and mine have this little difference, sir. Dane looks for it where the Rifles are, and I, where the Rifles aren't."

"I suppose you haven't worked out what this increase of efficiency is going to look like on the estimates?"

"That I have, to an anna!"

He named the sum. The Governor opened his eyes. It was twenty times that claimed by the D. C. Some errant imp of humour goaded him to ask:

"You couldn't cut it down by five hundred pounds?"

"Not by five hundred pence, sir!"

The Governor walked to the door of the tent and looked out. Perhaps he saw again, like the transformation-scene in a pantomime, that bleached and naked valley, verdant with goodly grain and fruit for the harvest. Was it possible that he was putting his money upon the wrong horse? Then a feeling almost of shame succeeded, as of a growing boy convicted of believing in fairies. Five hundred pounds was not a great sum, but it was too much for this new Aladdin and his magic irrigation. What Dane pictured was no less than a miracle, and his experience of the service was not such as to lead him to bank on miracles.

He glanced back at Cavell, glossy, debonair, immeasurably assured. All his traditions drew him to Cavell. They talked the same language and they played the same game. All the moves of the game were taken upon recognised lines, and its prizes were such as they both desired. Dane was to him a stranger; where did he come from and for what did he work? He did not talk, dress, drink like Cavell, but pursued his solitary way to unknown ends. In spite of all this, Page hesitated. Even in this imperfect world men do not become governors who are devoid of all judgment and imagination. He thought he could read Cavell as clearly as a book; he certainly could read the page Cavell had opened for him, that of the keen but limited soldier, athirst for his opportunity. He had decided long ago in Berbera that Cavell was the weapon he would use. Now he was facing the results of that decision, for he knew quite well that both in Whitehall and in the bush the meaning of the proposed step would be understood. He must commit himself still more deeply to a military policy. He had a moment's resentment against the thought that he was not free to choose: that he was already committed too deeply to turn back or even to halt. His dispatches home had been constructed to pave the way for some such action. If he hesitated now, he could only drift between the extremes represented by Cavell and Dane.

That Cavell's was the best policy for his interest he firmly

believed. But was it not also the best for the country? All the pressure of his training at school, at Sandhurst, in the Army and in the administration weighed upon him. He believed it was best for the country, and believed it honestly. His intelligence had not been developed so strongly as his sense of tradition: when this united with his interest, his intelligence gave up the unequal struggle.

Cavell, watching his chief, knowing no conflict in his own mind, did know something of what passed in the other's. He guessed what Dane had had to say, and had been especially careful to keep the D. C. out of the conversation. He saw that he had won again. An animal vitality reinforced him so that the Governor, glancing anxiously at him, felt an assurance that the weapon, upon whose fitness his whole future might depend, would not fail him.

He sat down, and they plunged into details.

XI

THUS were the high politics of Somaliland decided. Affairs had turned a corner and proceeded with increased momentum, while Cavell and the Governor, following their course with satisfaction, gazed as far ahead as they could see. Meanwhile, what of Blaker, whose destination was for the moment in the balance, like a straw whirling round, to be swilled safely ashore or hurried down-stream, wherever the flood might lead?

The Governor had camped twelve miles from Hargeisa the night before his arrival and had ridden in early the next day. The D. C., as was meet, had ridden out to receive him. Halted in the shade at the foot of the slope, he had watched the two men, jogging side by side, in an abstracted silence that might have endured from dawn. The warmth of Dane's reception of Blaker had jarred the Governor, and he had bidden them ride on quickly to prepare for his camp.

Blaker, bright-eyed, with rakish helmet, chatted as they galloped along the winding track.

"Deliver me from Great Men, Major. That man Page travels with the ceremony of the Great Llama of mysterious Tibet. If that isn't the potentate who never did travel. As for his geniality—it chilled the soup and led me to spill cherry brandy all over his cigarettes. It even caused me to break into song, as thus:

> "The Governor—he is immense;
> He has the true vice-regal air;
> He oozes genial common-sense,
> And (what in Great Men is so rare)
> Without familiarity,
> He can unbend
> And condescend
> To jest with folk like you and me."

"Is that your own?"

"We-el, Mrs. Cavell began it in Berbera, but she got stuck. So I finished it on the way here."

"Look here, Blaker, speaking of Mrs. Cavell, I strongly object to doing your dirty work. What are you and she playing at?"

"Well, we were playing at being friends, but that game came to an abrupt conclusion."

"When her husband appeared in Berbera?"

"How clever of you to guess," laughed Blaker, presumptuous in small matters, because of his real respect for the older man.

"I should have thought Cavell's wife was the last woman you would have chosen to be intimate with."

"Yes, you *would* have thought, but now you know her, you will understand."

Dane shrugged his shoulders and talked of Zeila.

"Zeila," said Blaker.

> "Zeila, I intend to make my field of Waterloo,
> Speaking, *bien entendu*, from the ducal point of view."

"You needn't try and fool me, Blaker."

"Now, should I? Since writing to you I have made enquiries from the house-agents, the P.W.D. They assure me the bungalow at Zeila is well furnished and beautifully situated; all windows face the sea; bracing air; *very* exclusive neighbourhood, and I am told there is plenty of land available for a nine-hole golf-course."

Dane cursed him for an ass, but that was the only tone in which Blaker could be got to talk of Zeila.

When Dane walked across to the Governor's tent for his interview, Blaker said nothing. He sat upon the veranda and waited. When Dane came back he was mending a lemon-coloured cardigan with khaki wool.

"Well?" he said, stooping to gnaw through the end of the yarn.

"Nothing," replied Dane, deliberately obtuse. "Just seen the Governor. That's all." He turned away from Blaker. He had so little hope to hold out that he decided to say nothing about his conversation with the Governor.

"Quite enough, I should say." Blaker's voice was still half muffled by the jersey. "What about a stiff one?" Dane shook his head. Blaker went on with sudden animation. "I say, wasn't it sickening about poor old Sheringham? Never got a send-off, or a decent word. That little hell-cat, Daphne Colver, who hunted him like a tiger a year ago, never said good-bye. I'm sick and tired of all officialdom, of all sleek jackals, who lick the pavement of Government House and sit

around H. E. with their tongues out. Can't be too far away from them, I say. That's why I'm glad I'm going to Zeila." He bit off another strand of wool savagely.

"What are you doing that for?"

"Because I'm going to call on Mrs. Cavell. Where's her unspeakable husband?"

"With the Governor."

"Good business! Look here, Dane, I want you to come with me. Those scavengers in Berbera——" He broke off. "It looks better, you see."

"I can't come with you. She and I are not on speaking terms."

"What! What! I'd as soon expect you to philander with a woman as to quarrel with one. No, don't go. I know it's madness to defend Cavell's wife to you, but I believe she's a good sort, straight and clean as they make 'em, and *that's* the very reason why I want to see her."

"I'll come with you, but I don't promise to chaperon you the whole time."

"It isn't expected, Major dear," laughed Blaker.

Rhona, dressed in white for tennis, came running out of the house to greet Blaker. Dear, familiar Blaker, curly hair, lazy voice, and nonsensical talk; her whole body felt warm with affection for him. Dane, in the course of a tempestuous greeting, she managed to ignore almost entirely. "It *is* good to see you. But how you have grown!"

"Quite a little man now, isn't he?"

"But, Blaker, dear, what a long time you've been coming."

"Alas! I had no fit raiment in which to meet your radiance."

"Come in. How nice it is to see you again."

"Why, do you love me, after all?"

"Of course I do. Haven't I made scones for you with my own fair hands and a box of toffee for your journey, baby that you are! But, dear friend, what have you done to your beautiful woolly coat?"

"Mended it to please you," muttered Blaker.

She laughed aloud, tore it off his back, and hurried in for her work-basket. He followed her, and for a moment neither of them noticed that Dane had somehow detached himself. Then Blaker said:

"But I insist on your being nice to the Major. Before I fetch him in, you must promise."

"No. I want to talk to you. He doesn't want to come in. He's gone off to speak to those police."

Blaker arose, solemn as a Spanish grandee. "I am afraid I cannot stay unless you ask him in. He came to oblige me."

"Don't be silly, Blaker. Sit down."

"Mrs. Cavell," said the boy earnestly, "you are making some absurd mistake about Dane. He's one of the best. I'd stake my soul on Dane's character. I've stood by Dane many times, Mrs. Cavell, in the past few months, and I'm going on with the process. He's my best friend."

Rhona wondered what qualities in Dane could possibly arouse this strong and rather beautiful devotion. Men's standards were, of course, different from women's. It seemed possible for men to possess many vices and lack even more graces and yet earn the comfortable title of a good sort amongst their own sex.

"I'm not going to quarrel with you," she said. "There isn't time. If he reappears, we'll fetch him in to have tea. And now, Blaker, about Zeila and your letter."

But Blaker had nothing to say about Zeila. He could only laugh.

"You see, it's the Governor's subtle, little way of getting rid of awkward officials. When I am gone—they give me three weeks—it will be Dane's turn. He's tough; they won't dispose of him under six months. Then, if Durell doesn't toe the line——"

"Don't forget you're talking to an enemy agent."

"Enemy! Good Lord! I don't mean to take you very seriously as an enemy. Some day, I feel sure, the light will shine and you'll be one of us."

The words seemed to leave an echo on the air that, without Blaker's laughing intonation, sounded too serious for their conversation.

"My dear young man," said Rhona, "I keep strictly outside the politics of Somaliland. I have only one party, that is Jack's. The affairs of Somaliland don't interest me."

Preposterous that this golden-haired friend of his should be Cavell's wife, should submit her shining spirit to him, should call him Jack.

"But, Blaker," she went on, "we are talking nothings. You said you wanted to speak to me about Zeila. Is there anything I or—or Jack could do now? Is it too late?"

"Much too late. And besides, I told you that I had changed my mind about Zeila since I wrote to you."

"Yes, but you were lying."

"Mrs. Cavell!"

"I am quite sure of it."

" Can't you credit me with any courage, then ? "

" I do, Blaker, and that's why I think you are lying. Need you bluff me ? Aren't you a bit tired of pretending ? Wouldnt it be a relief to let go to someone, and someone so safe as I'—a woman, outside these jealousies, whom you could trust ? Or perhaps," as Blaker did not answer, " you don't trust me."

" I daresay it's interesting to you——" and broke off, his pose of gaiety destroyed.

Rhona would not have uttered another word about Zeila, being aghast at her own unwisdom, but presently Blaker dropped his head on one hand, and wisdom was thrown to the winds. She moved the hand gently and saw his eyes.

" When you look at me like that," he said, " I forget to feel ashamed. But don't sympathise. Men in the Service have got to do these jobs ; if they can't, they must be scrapped. It's just my fault, my particular moral disease that I can't bear loneliness. I don't care what you call me—cowardly, degenerate —the fact remains. I can't do more than go and try, and I am doing that. I lived through the last hell because I thought I shouldn't, at my age, get another lonely station. It's not usual out here. But I've been fool enough to be loyal to Chard, so this is what I get."

" Oh, Blaker, these things aren't done. Nobody would be so wicked. You've got morbid about it."

At that unpopular word, Blaker got up.

" Possibly. I've only to get out of bed the right side tomorrow morning and all will be well. There are even simpler ways of getting cheerful."

Rhona knew how unworthy this was, but Blaker could not offend her. Something must and should be done for him, however unpleasant her part in it. The boy brought in tea.

" Go on eating a moment," she said, and went outside. At the entrance to the compound Dane was talking to the policeman under whose conduct the prisoners brought wood and water to the house. She went up to him.

" Major Dane, will you talk to me upon Blaker's account ? "

" Certainly, Mrs. Cavell.

" Blaker must not be allowed to go to Zeila. I know him and I am very fond of him, and it is my firm conviction that he will go mad if he has another lonely station. You seem to be fond of him. Is there nothing you can do ? The administration can't be so inhuman and rigid that it must commit crimes like this."

" Crime indeed ! It's an opportunity. Blaker has pulled

himself together wonderfully. I take off my hat to him.

"Oh, can't you *see!* It's all bluff."

"Of course it is. Do you think we are all in love with every job that we get? If you have been breaking down his defences, Mrs. Cavell, I think it's very wrong of you."

"I can't help what you think, Major Dane. Blaker's life may depend upon the two of us who know the truth about him. Will you go and see the Governor, or shall I?"

"I hardly know which would be the more futile."

"You refuse. Then I shall go."

Dane considered. He found it extraordinarily difficult to talk to her and rather absurd.

"I don't know whether that would do you or Blaker most harm. As far as Blaker is concerned, it would probably prevent any possibility of his being recalled before his time."

"Very well, I shall get my husband to speak."

"Your husband!" echoed Dane. The conversation was becoming ridiculous. Standing alone with her for the first time, he suddenly realised what delicious creatures fair women can be. She struck him as being altogether too fragile and ineffective to be mixed up with men's business: the courage in her eyes was so desperate and the firm line of the lips trembled pathetically. She gave herself away with every feature, every movement, and this filled him with a most exhilarating sense of power over her, so that he felt that with a single harsh word he could have brought her to her knees.

"I certainly should not discuss it with your husband," he said, with a significance she was forced to understand.

"Why are you afraid to go to the Governor?" was her revenge.

Dane smiled for the first time. Taunts against his courage affected him very little, but he seemed to lay himself open to them rather often. Coming from this little white and gold creature it seemed especially funny. He could not for the life of him think of the proper answer. While he hesitated, Rhona repented her childish question and said quite humbly:

"Please, Major Dane, what can I do for him?"

"Send him away from your house immediately, and don't even mention his name to your husband. Good afternoon, Mrs. Cavell."

Whether Rhona took the first part of this advice or not, Blaker had certainly left the bungalow when Cavell came hurrying in just at sunset.

"Sorry, darling, I'm so late, but I've been with H. E. I'm afraid you'll be alone for dinner. We are entertaining him tonight and I ought to be there. I'll leave Aden with you. You don't mind, dear?"

"Of course not. I quite see that you must be there. But, Jack, before you go, will you do one thing for me? Will you sit here, and be perfectly good and quiet, while I talk to you, and promise not to be cross with me, or I shall cry."

Cavell, who was in high spirits, picked her up and sat down, nursing her like a child.

"I know—you're still wanting to break your neck on Grainger's pony."

"No."

"You want more stores from Berbera?"

"No. Major Dane and Blaker called this afternoon." Her arms were round his neck, but that did not soften his exclamation.

"Dane! Oh, what did he want?"

"It was about Blaker."

Cavell made her sit upright so that he could look at her.

"I thought, Rhona, that you and I had said our last word about Blaker at Berbera. I've been glad to see that you have not corresponded, and I hoped it was unnecessary to warn you not to see him when he came through."

"Jack, you couldn't have imagined I shouldn't see him—not even wish him good luck! It wouldn't have been human."

"I wish you wouldn't use that word, Rhona. It may mean something to you, but it means nothing to me. What had Blaker to say?"

"I am going to tell you, and it's too important for you to regard it personally. He is in no state to go alone to Zeila. He's too young and temperamental. I feel in my bones that something will happen. Also he's just had a long spell alone."

Cavell laughed, stood up and put her down.

"So that's it. I might have guessed it. Blaker hasn't the guts for his job, and he hasn't the guts to come into the open and say so. He comes around here and whines to a woman at Dane's suggestion, because they think you're foolish enough to do their dirty work for them."

"Jack, it's horrible to hear you talk like that. You degrade everything—everybody. Blaker never meant to tell me. It just slipped out, and Major Dane had nothing to do with it."

"Don't be more silly than you can help, Rhona. Your new friend Dane has been pulling wires to get his protégé Blaker ent here to strengthen his position against me. He has Blaker

in his pocket. He wrote to the Governor recommending Jackson for the job at Zeila, because he can't run Jackson in leading strings."

"He never told me."

"He wouldn't. Take off your rose-coloured spectacles, Rhona, and see men as they really are, not as your girls' school sentimentality wants them to be. Every man in this country is playing for his own hand. They're all out for promotion and money, and there isn't one who wouldn't down the other man by fair means or foul if he could get his job or score off him in any way. And the dirtiest fighter of the lot is the D.C, Hargeisa."

"I don't believe he's as bad as all that."

"Oh, don't you! But if I tell you he was intriguing against me with the Governor this very morning, running down my policy, cursing the Rifles, trying to undermine my position. Now look here, Rhona, let's have this thing out once for all. I'm not going to argue with you. You're my wife. Are you with me or against me? Dane is my enemy, and yours, too. I'm a good hater, and I don't do it by halves. I am out to down Dane, discredit him, show him up, chuck him out of the Service if I can. It's him or me, and by God! I intend it to be him. Is that good enough for you?"

Rhona, battered by this avalanche, and all the woman in her fascinated by such a display of virility, was silent. He came and stood beside her.

"Come on, what do you say? Let's settle this business here and now, once and for all."

"You're so violent, Jack. Is it a matter of life and death that I should regard every man as a rotter who disagrees with your policy, whatever your policy may be?"

"My dear child, if you're one for half-truths and compromise you've made a mistake. You've married a primitive man, and come out to a primitive country. I can't change myself, and I can't change Somaliland because you're not inclined to give a whole-hearted loyalty to your husband. Life is hard here, men have to be strong, and they want strong women to mate with them. Didn't you belong to a house at school, and play team games? Where's your *esprit de corps?* Wouldn't you back your country, right or wrong? Well, supposing I'm bad, wicked; supposing I'm downed in the long run, aren't you going to stand by me? Is the house of Cavell going to be divided against itself, that the Philistines may rejoice?" He paused, and then unerringly struck the right note. "My dear, I may

be all kinds of a rotter, but I certainly shall be if you don't stand by me."

Rhona looked up at him with tears in her eyes. That was enough for him. He swept her off the ground in his arms, the violence of his physical grasping of her equalled the violence of his argument, and if there were a little bit of ice deep in her heart that nothing could melt, what did it matter to him when her lips met his, and her arms clung round his neck, because it was all in the world she had to cling to.

Cavell, who had actually enjoyed the struggle, hurried off to change for dinner. As he plunged into his bath, his fine body thrilled with life. His double victory intoxicated him: Dane's defeat was as sweet to consider as Rhona's last surrender. Suddenly he laughed aloud, and Rhona, sitting on her bed, heard him. He had just remembered that he had promised Durell to drop in upon Dane and ask him and Blaker to dinner. How deliciously funny that he should really have forgotten, and how much funnier to run round now with an excuse that Dane could not possibly believe.

Rhona smiled at him a little sadly when he presented himself, groomed to his usual perfection, every detail of his clothes and manner a contribution to his distinction. How could a woman not smile at such an admirable human figure, knowing it her own.

He kissed her with passion. "Oh, you darling, you darling! I must hurry away from you, beautiful one. I have to see Dane *en route*."

"Oh, Jack, not——"

"Not yet *à l'outrance*, sweetheart. That is yet to come. I don't mind how soon if you are there to hold my horse."

"But why——"

"Merely to ask him to dinner."

"But it will be too late."

"I hope so," he said, laughing as he went out.

Dane and Blaker were just sitting down to dinner as Cavell walked into the lamplight on the veranda steps.

"A thousand apologies, Dane. Hullo, young Blaker! Durell and I have muddled it between us. I was to have fetched you both to dinner and I altogether forgot until now. And now I'm afraid I'm too late."

"I am afraid so," said Dane.

"Well, Blaker, how are we? Passing us like a ship in the night, bound for the Antipodes! My wife told me all about your visit. I am sorry you came when I was out."

Cavell was leaning over the veranda rail, gay as a boy, and

scoring all the time. The two men at the table watched him, but made no attempt to retaliate.

"I'll explain to H.E. exactly why you were not there. Perhaps you'll stroll across afterwards and join us at poker."

"Thanks," said Blaker. "But I'm for an early bed and an early start."

"Well, well, Blaker, don't take Zeila or yourself too seriously, that's my last word. And don't try to follow all the advice our earnest-minded D.C. offers you to-night. He'll deliver you the true gospel as a parting gift, if I know him. Good night."

At dinner the Colonel felt a glorious lack of the need for stimulant. The Governor observed his abstemiousness with satisfaction. But Page had something on his mind, and after dinner he drew Cavell out of the mess-tent and walked him up and down beyond the stockade, talking quietly upon a subject that presented no difficulties to Cavell.

"After all, sir, it isn't your responsibility. Chard introduced him into the country and approved of his trying to get into the administration. You needn't keep him there long. He ought to be jolly glad to get a second chance, instead of whining behind your back to Dane and making a nuisance of himself to my wife."

Cavell's outspokenness, as before, at once shocked and delighted the Governor. He could not resist the temptation of provoking it. He knew no officer should speak so freely to him, but he believed that in Cavell's case it arose, not from lack of respect, but from lack of discretion. And it paid him to obtain these artless revelations. It was pleasing, too, to hear his own arguments endorsed by repetition. But he had no intention of discussing them with Cavell.

"It's clear you don't want young Blaker here," he said significantly. It was just as well to show Cavell how easily he saw through him. But the Colonel was not abashed. He swung round and stood still, facing him.

"No, sir, I *don't*," he replied, with a vigour that surprised his chief. Only very strong reason could have excused it. Then he remembered that Cavell had that very strong reason and must be forgiven.

"Well, I'm glad to have had your opinion, Cavell. Good night."

Cavell smiled all the way back to the tents. He strolled in to see Durell, and chatted with him with unusual cheeriness or half an hour. His lieutenant counted his two glasses with

astonishment, and when Cheetham and Newsome dropped in for a "last one" they found him sitting alone as if he had seen a ghost.

"Hold me up, Newsome," cried Cheetham. "Has the unexpected—the incredible come to pass before our eyes? Has—oh!—has our worthy Major touched his limit?"

"If so," said Newsome, "he will have lost all prestige in the Rifles. But I cannot think it. Let us not think it, Cheetham."

"I was only wondering," said Durell, "whether the leopard can change his spots or a fish from the bottom of the deep sea turn into a dried haddock."

Beyond the river-bed the D.C. and his guest were late to bed. Blaker was too young not to feel, as the Colonel turned away, that they had behaved tamely. He had given Dane precedence in retaliating, and Dane had said and done nothing. When, later, they heard a distant spurt of song, and glanced towards where the lights from the M.R. shone through the scanty trees, he had a forlorn sense of rejection. He had felt many times in Berbera the bitterness of the Ishmaelite; now on the eve of banishment he looked across at the man for whose sake, rather than that of the ex-governor, he had suffered, and had a startling moment of regret.

Dane seemed to feel neither humiliation nor prescription. When they said good night, standing on the flat roof where he was to sleep, he then said to Blaker:

"I want to thank you for the way you've stuck to us. Chard deserves every bit of your loyalty as a man and as a governor. But we've got to back up the present administration in every way we can. Because I've had to stand out with good reason, there's no reason why you should stand out with bad ones. Your job in Zeila is straightforward. If you do it well, you will get recognition in the end. I know the luck has seemed agin' you, but a man with a grievance does no one any good, least of all himself. Anyhow, you've always got a friend here."

"Two friends," muttered Blaker."

"Possibly, but I shouldn't speculate too much on that. Now, good night, old chap. You'll be here again in six months."

Blaker produced a grin which he hoped would pass muster in the moonlight, and went off down the steps. Dane sat for a long time on his bed, watching the hyænas slip among the thorn trees like blue ghosts. But when you sit upon an African roof at night you soon realise that you are with the African sky, not the earth. He looked up and collected the familiar stars. Never had their cold illimitable spirit, in whose presence he took

council, watched him through a worse hour. Was it worth while to work for a land that could produce nothing but thorns and beasts of prey. The tribes beyond the ragged black horizon of the bush—were they much better than beasts of prey themselves, living their unrecorded savage lives, and dying unremembered like the lions and the leopards? Beside them the white man was a god, should he not force these animals to serve his turn, as Cavell did, that he might follow his own god-like fortunes in another country? Supposing the valley, white with moonlight, were white with harvest, would that mean more than the multiplication of these human animals, with the multiplication of their struggles, their crimes, their lusts and their dumb sufferings? He reckoned up the total of his failures for one day. His policy, his irrigation schemes, his friend—defeat in all cases, and always at the same hands. Could he go on any longer alone? He was sitting now in a great emptiness not only of life and beauty, but of hope and prayer. Hate is poor spiritual food for man day by day, but he could find only scanty fare of love to supplement it. It was true that Blaker lay below him, wide-eyed, he guessed, and he yearned over him. But he had failed to save Blaker, and now that the boy was going into the wilderness he could not even give him his trust. In Blaker was no comfort, only pain. If only he could bear the burden the other was not strong enough to bear, or even give away some of his own strength, though it left him undefended at such moments as these.

His wandering thoughts, as if they had circled round the indigo limits of the skies, calling in vain upon every star, came back to him empty. He sat, too tired to think any more. His head drooped down from the cold magnificence above him, across which the moon took her remote journey to the West.

XII

By one of those accidents that the world in its wisdom refuses to credit, if it hears of them, Rhona crossed Blaker's path on her early morning ride. She was alone, but for the two soldiers of her escort, and she rode with him the first two miles of his journey. They were rational, even gay, until they came to the fatal word "good-bye," when Blaker, sitting upright in his saddle beside her, his resolution fighting through his shyness, like an April sun between the shower clouds, made this speech:

"Of course you know I love you, because its quite impossible to do otherwise, but I want you to understand—I love you as a friend, because that's the only kind of love you will allow. And now I'm going to try to make good at Zeila, and—and—and that's all."

Rhona hardly knew whether she was going to give him a good hug or burst into tears. Blaker's youth, as he made this speech, seemed to turn her heart to water. It was all such a poignant mixture of the man and the boy, of weakness and strength, of determination and nervousness. The charm of him at this ominous moment pierced her and left an enduring wound with its memory. She saw and loved his strong, fine figure, his eyes, as he turned them away from her to stare so sternly up the track—could he see it quite clearly? His throat was bare and she could see the ripples passing down it, as if he were swallowing a series of small hard lumps.

She did not say much because it was so very important that he should not break down. She did say, however:

"If it is of the slightest use to you, Blaker dear, write to me."

"And will you answer?"

She paused, and then said, "Yes, but only if you write first."

She might have been riding home through the depths of the

sea, for everything was blurred, as if a watery current flowed between herself and the trees.

That was the last of Blaker.

The night before he left Hargeisa had been important to several people there. It had been something of a climax and had left behind it an air of expectation. But nothing happened, and the sense of alertness gradually slackened, as the ordinary routine of life resumed itself through the succeeding weeks and months.

Cavell went about his work quietly, overhauling and strengthening the Rifles. In course of time new camels arrived from Arabia and Bikanir, and two squat store-houses arose beside the pony lines. Two or three times a week the valley re-echoed with rifle or machine-gun practice, and the subalterns grumbled half the day, as subalterns will, at the work demanded by the Colonel's rising standard. Durell could say less, but he felt the more. He had been in Somaliland much longer than the Colonel, whose appointment had been a surprise and a blow to him. He was fat and kindly, content, the Mess thought, to serve at fifty under Cavell at forty. No one in Somaliland knew what his feelings were towards Cavell as a man, or his opinion of his methods as colonel. Durell demanded of life, first of all, peace; his other desires and opinions were secondary to this. Now that his peace was disturbed, it was suddenly understood in the Rifles that these were far less in harmony with those of the Colonel than they had always supposed. This was especially true with regard to his chief's ideas of tightening up the men's discipline.

To Rhona, who did not follow her husband's activities, the period was even less eventful than to him. She had by now reached that stage in married life when the last false estimate of troth-time love is gone.

Not that she judged Cavell. If she saw that he was not the perfect knight of her first dreams, yet he showed up well in a darkening world. He was ambitious and violent; he was a heavy drinker, and had strange qualities for which she hardly had a name, but then he lived in an unscrupulous world, and was gloriously superior to all the other men. Closing her mind to all opinions about Somali politics but his, and seeing only through his eyes, she condemned them all. Evening after evening she watched the officers flock on to her veranda after tennis for the sundown drinks. Night after night, when they had finished dinner, she sat amongst them, while Cavell filled their glasses,

and they accepted them with words and movements that use had made almost instinctive. As midnight approached and she sat, alone of the group abstaining, marking their flushed faces and the growing fluency of their talk, a certain contempt for them all would come unbidden into her heart. Did they realise just how they appeared and how they changed in the eyes of a watcher? She looked back to the evenings in her own home; the comparison was to the disadvantage of her guests. They seemed to have lost interest in general questions: conversation ran eternally upon the same topics—Rifles' shop, the respective merits of Cheetham and Grainger's polo ponies, the spread of the horns of Newsome's last kudu, the iniquity of Dane's latest order, whether it dealt with game preservation, tree-felling, or punctuality in sending off the mail. The jokes were Rifles' jokes; the arguments serial arguments. Judging swiftly, harshly and superficially, as youth judges, she dismissed Durell and the Doctor as self-indulgent sluggards; Grainger as a soldier and nothing more; Newsome and Cheetham as empty-headed youths, expert only in conversational fooling, hunting and drinking. Rankin was the one she avoided most carefully. He was strangely variable in his treatment of her; generally he ignored her, but once or twice she had caught a concentrated and burning stare, which destroyed her serenity for the whole evening.

Amongst them her husband seemed almost noble. His physical beauty and hardness put him in a class apart, unravished by the self-indulgence which made the others more or less gross in her eyes. He worked hard and joyously. He was efficient and self-reliant. In all the essentials of life he was righteous. This she believed fanatically, because she must believe it. He put his heart into his work, because it was the work that was the best for the country. If he drank too heavily at times, it was because his physique could stand it. He was master of the habit, not its slave. Moreover, she noticed with delight that he was drinking less and less. If he was hard, he was just; if he was ambitious, he was straight as a spear.

Of the corner of Africa upon which she was living, she thought hardly at all. No one encouraged her to take an intelligent interest in the country or its life, human or animal. This was one reason why she had regretted that they were not on more friendly terms with Dane; he could have helped her here, and she often longed to play with his menagerie. But gradually these interests atrophied; she came to regard Somaliland simply as the opportunity for her husband's career. She looked

back with surprise at the overwhelming fears that had come to her in Berbera—the terror in the storm and the night on the roof, when she had vowed that if the land had a spirit and fierce claims upon her, she would shut out thought and sight and sound of it, living in her own little white world, ignorant of the world of darkness surrounding her. She congratulated herself upon her success in this attempt. As well might a rat in a cask, adrift in mid-ocean, pride himself upon his security and refuse to believe in the sea.

She thought much of Blaker. Frightened at her promise, she first hoped he would not write: when she saw her fears were baseless she hungered for a letter. Then, as the weeks ran on, she smiled a smile that came too often, and would in the years change the expression of her mouth. Why should Blaker, more than any other of them, tell the truth? She began to see him with the same jaundiced view in which she saw the M.R. officers. Jack was probably right when he said that most young men manufacture a sentimental episode out of every meeting with a pretty woman, if she is fool enough to take them seriously.

These and many other conclusions Rhona drew: her husband having given her the clue to life, she went on with the interpretation herself. The questioning look in her eyes, so noticeable when she came, had almost gone; why should she question any more when she had her answer?

Only one man saw that Rhona was changing. This was Rankin, who had a poet's eye for the beautiful in mind and body. The Colonel's wife no longer flushed when she caught his fixed gaze, and she no longer avoided him; on the other hand, she no more believed what he said or offered him more than platitudes. When some story of hardness to man or beast cropped up in their men's talk, he glanced to see her puzzled frown and missed it.

He spoke to Dane of this one day, adding with uncertain relevance that he was beginning to hate Cavell. But Dane only replied that, being an Irishman, he was naturally up agin' his superiors.

It might be too much to say that Rankin and Dane were friends, but they were often together. Rankin had come out to Somaliland because he liked fighting. As none was forthcoming for the moment, he did his work swiftly and adequately, and spent his leisure observing his fellows. He soon came to the conclusion that Dane was the most interesting person to watch in Hargeisa, and the D.C. grew accustomed to the Irishman dropping in to the bungalow. He liked his voice, and when Rankin came across at night from the Rifles, with a book under

his arm, he pushed away his novel or his logarithms, and listened with closed eyes to the murmuring of Irish poetry or old French and Italian love stories. How far he went with Rankin into these decorated worlds, the reader never knows; he always found Dane already on the *terra firma* of the normal when he struggled back to it himself.

Dane was busy. Hardly had the Governor departed than prisoners were seen working upon new gardens by the river-bed. The subalterns, who saw no difference between the new and the old gardens, thought it was all very amusing. The daily ration of vegetables had been delivered upon the camp for so long that they had forgotten to think how it came.

"I suppose," said Cheetham, "Hargeisa bazaar is to become a sort of Covent Garden."

"Teetotallers generally end up by becoming vegetarians." This was Newsome.

Rankin corrected him. "As it happens, Dane's not teetotal."

"Comparatively." Newsome looked across his double whisky at the Doctor, who was arranging and rearranging his own collection of drinks according to some secret rite.

"Anyhow," said Grainger, as if he wished to be fair, "digging gardens in the sand is quite a harmless little hobby. I did it myself when I was young."

"There's something in that," said Rankin, whose eyes had lit up at Grainger's phrase. They dropped the subject. Rankin had a way of reading unnatural meanings into what they said which put them out of their stride.

It was Rankin, of course, who noticed that the new garden was different from the others. It was very large, covering five acres, and it was elaborately laid out in a maze of small earthworks. Two long extensions reached out from it, funnel-wise, far up the slope behind. The D.C. spent all his spare time there, and soon a number of extra workers, poor women from the town, were added to his gangs. Cavell marked the hired labour with surprise; wondered if he had been less clever in reading the Governor than he thought, and wrote a chatty letter to Mrs Clover. But his information was new to the Treasury.

Rankin, aware that he was peering into the most important mystery of the mysterious D.C., expressed one night his interest in the garden. Suddenly Dane interrupted him.

"How much are you interested?"

"Very much."

"As much as ten pounds?"

"What do you mean?"

"As a loan."

Rankin whistled long and loud, and said, "So that's how the land lies, is it?"

"Yes, and that's how it's likely to lie, unless I can raise the wind."

"Or the rain," answered Rankin, feeling for his pocket-book.

"You'd let me have it? Thank you." He stuffed the emerging pocket-book back into his pocket.

"You won't take it!"

"No, thanks. I'll see it through myself. I think I'd rather. All the same, thanks very much. If you want to do something for the garden you can take steps to prevent your animals taking a short-cut through it one fine day and messing up the work. I've written to the O.C., but I'm afraid I've only given away a good idea."

"Good Lord, Dane! Such things simply aren't done in a white administration."

Dane reflected. "You see, the garden means a good deal to me." Which opened a further abyss of hatred to the Irishman's eyes.

Durell reproached Dane for his encouragement of the Adjutant.

"It's no service to the young man. I doubt if Cavell could do him much harm. But he certainly won't do him any good. It's different with me. I might have an assignation with you, and kiss you on both cheeks every day in the middle of the river-bed, and nothing would happen. Nothing can happen to a permanent number two like myself. But Rankin is young, and though he's as jumpy as a cat—damn it all! I like the beggar."

"I've laid no bait for young Rankin. You're seeing everything yellow, Durell. Why this gloom about yourself?"

"I'm fed up. And I'm worried."

"Why?" asked Dane, as Durell had stopped; and again, "What are you worried about?"

"The Rifles. Especially 'B' Company. Mixed lot, 'B' Company. Shouldn't like to be in a hole with only 'B' Company to fall back upon."

"I hope you won't, Major," said Dane politely. Then, as Durell would neither speak nor go, he added, "Any notion of what's wrong with 'em?"

Durell struck his fingers one by one with the stem of his pipe.

"Trouble with the women in the married lines for making too much noise; Private Hersi Jama flogged twice for the same offence by mistake—Cavell's; two days C.B. for——"

"I know! I know! In short—Cavell's discipline." Dane was silent now. This was emphatically not his affair, yet, as a man who had himself commanded Somali troops and taken them into action more than once, he understood the significance of all this even better than Durell. Why should he worry about Cavell's interests? Let him go to damnation his own way! The next moment, startled at himself, he was thinking, "Not that way! Not that way!" He said earnestly, "You ought to do something about it, Durell."

"I can't."

"You ought to go to him."

Durell laughed bitterly. "I have, and been ordered out of his tent like a dog before I'd got the second word out of my mouth. I tell you, the M.R. is a one-man show now. I can't eel any responsibility. Cavell wants machines, not men. The worst of it is, I no longer trust my own judgment. I expect I'm a disgruntled old grouser. Why shouldn't he be right? He's more than ten years younger than I am, and twenty times as keen. He'll carry it off somehow. I'm getting too old for this country. I can't stand Cavell's pace; the man's possessed of a thousand devils. I know you're up against him, but you haven't a hope. He's got success written all over him. And, mark you, it isn't only that he's got the air and the talky-talk—he can deliver the goods. Furthermore, he's a rattling fine polo player, and he's popular. The boys over there fall over each other to get a good word out of him."

"That's to your credit. You could put a spoke in his wheel, if you cared."

"Why should I care? All I want is a quiet life. The most serious quarrel I have with the O.C. is that he's taking far too much to lime-juice and soda. So if you had any hope that he was already on our special tropical short-cut to damnation, you'd better abandon it. Seems to me, you're not doing much scoring just now."

"No," agreed Dane. "I'm not. I haven't Cavell's finesse, so I don't compete. Besides, I'm not out to annoy him."

"I know," said Durell, answering the emphasis on the word "annoy," and finished his glass reflectively. "Well, I don't blame you. It was a damned shame to send young Blaker to Zeila, and he turned the scale, as I supposed you guessed. Cavell's working up for something big now, and it's my belief

that if his opportunity doesn't come, he'll make it. Having committed enough indiscretions for one evening, I'll shift across."

Dane had said nothing when Durell spoke of Blaker because he had nothing to say. He had expected a letter by the first runner from Zeila after Blaker's arrival, but none had come. He had written twice in the succeeding months, but there was still silence at Zeila. He had resisted the temptation to write to the Secretary, Forster, for news, because he knew that all Berbera would hear of his anxiety and make conversation out of it.

He looked along his table on one of the rare, but inevitable, nights when he was entertaining the Cavells, and studied the Colonel's face, wondering how even that cruel and unscrupulous man could have passed sentence upon a boy such as Blaker, knowing fully what he did. To Dane, callousness and egotism were written all over the spare, handsome face beyond the lamp. He could not believe that all the world could not read them. Rhona, upon his right hand, was thinking that a bachelor dinner-party was a pathetic effort. Apparently Dane's notion of hospitality was to multiply the courses, open as many tins as possible, and put large butter-dishes full of preserved ginger and stale chocolates amongst the paper flowers. After dinner, she examined Dane's room. A couple of sheets out of the illustrated papers decorated the walls, the only other ornaments were products of the country of which she was sick to death—native baskets, mats, weapons and a few heads of game. What was there about the occupant of the room that made him a force in Somaliland? He seemed, in general, a passive sort of person, yet he was the rock upon which they were all divided.

When the men came in they cursed the dry season, now approaching its climax, told tales of dust-storms and discussed as to where the pinch was being felt most severely. Dane was the authority, and he gave it as his opinion that Hargeisa district would have a bad time before the rains broke. After two good years, the country was overstocked; and Derea Waraba's raids had caused a tribal drift to the North. Already there was severe suffering. Rhona, watching the faces, talking, smiling, exchanging information, marvelled that under this appearance of harmony and courtesy such rivalries could be hidden. There was Dane smiling (how seldom he smiled!) at some remark of Cavell's, yet Dane would ruin her husband if he could, would even, had it not been for the restraint of civilisation, kill him with satisfaction.

Dane was talking of his garden now, but reluctantly and superficially. She saw Grainger and Cheetham exchange glances; then, as Dane warmed up, surrendered herself to the interest of the subject. Dane jerked his head defiantly as he talked, and sketched airy diagrams with a hand as strong as a gorilla's. He talked of cedars, of how Somaliland had been shorn of them and of the possibilities of re-afforestation. Was it possible that he was really interested in these schemes, that some rare strain of altruism or romantic imagining moved him? The quick-glancing Rankin looked for her questioning eyes and frown, and found them. Then Cavell laughed suddenly, and said:

"Anyone listening to Dane might imagine he was really interested in providing shade for the Somal, not to speak of maize and barley, just as he might imagine, when he heard Durell and myself talking, that we really liked fighting. I wonder if ever in some communistic Utopia we shall do our jobs for the job's sake."

"But aren't you really interested in trees and crops, Major Dane?" asked Rhona. Dane looked at her, wondering whether the question was asked of guile or simplicity. Remembering that she was Cavell's wife, he said:

"What *do* you think, Mrs. Cavell? Your husband is right as usual. I want peace and plenty in Hargeisa so that I can make it the most important district in Somaliland and get a good transfer from it; just as your husband wants exactly the reverse, for exactly the same reason."

"It's not true—what Major Dane said about you?" asked Rhona as they went home.

"Isn't it?" Cavell laughed. "Or were you asking a question? Supposing I denied it—what would that be worth? You know me, dear, and you've heard me talk about my job. Either you believe or you don't. Anyhow, I don't set up to be a philanthropist. It's Dane's hypocrisy that makes me feel so sick."

"Yes," said Rhona.

Back in the bungalow, Rankin and Durell, lingering behind the others, were talking ponies. Durell said:

"The Colonel was sounding me the other day as to whether you were thinking of selling Hais. I don't expect he'd buy him directly, but he's had his eye on him ever since he saw you play polo on him in Berbera."

"Do you play?" said Rankin. "Then, why do you never turn up? The ground is getting quite good, though its rather dusty just now."

"Oh, I'm out of training," said Dane.

"I know the reason," explained Durell. "Cavell asked him to play; said that all the M.R. officers had to pay a subscription, and that of course, as he would be a guest, they couldn't let him subscribe. Matter of fact, Dane, I run the polo now and you can jolly well fork out the sub., and join the fun. It's as clear as daylight why the C.O. put you off. He's the only man of us that can play."

"It's not quite clear to me," said Rankin.

"Well, it will be when Dane comes across on Saturday."

When Durell went, Rankin stayed a moment in the starlit river-bed with Dane, and said, among other things:

"I hope you don't mind my asking, but why did you answer Mrs. Cavell like that about your work?"

"Good Lord, Rankin——"

"Because she asked the question in good faith and you let her down."

"Well, she'll have less of a jolt when she reaches the depths of Cavell's iniquity."

Rankin glanced around him up the river-bed. On the cliff at the curve a pale lamp shone from the Cavells' bungalow. On a line with where they stood could be seen the lights from Dane's veranda and from the camp. Everywhere else, the unmoving tattered line of the scant bush, and a stretch of savagery varying from a hundred miles in length to three hundred and fifty away to the borders of Abyssinia and across it.

"Ten white folk," said Rankin, "in the heart of darkest Africa, all absorbed in the business of quarrelling amongst themselves. It's a solemn thought, Major, that's what built up your Empire. Behold, I send you forth into all the world, but take with you neither loving kindness for the lost peoples, nor open your eyes to see the greatness of the land you inhabit, nor any provision for the end of your journey, lest you become humble and despair! It's not enterprise or genius for organisation that holds your Empire together; it's a facility for doing the right thing in the wrong place—it's dressing for dinner in the Solomon Islands, and playing football in Southern Nigeria, and talking scandal in the club at Baluchistan, that's what's done the trick; and you'll be all right so long as you don't stop for a moment to think what you are doing. You can go on glutting yourself upon a quarter of the world. See"—he flung out an arm to indicate the wide sky and dark bush—"how patiently Africa bears with you, like a huge elephant at the prick of the goad. There's no law here either of reward or

retribution. Listen to that!" Far away a hyæna called, then the tense silence of the bush closed in again. "Can you feel any spirit of Nemesis abroad to-night?"

"Yes, I can," said Dane; and then angrily, "Good night you damned Irishman!"

XIII

On the next Saturday afternoon, when Cavell, with a string of quiet curses, was keeping five boys busy about his ponies and equipment for polo, he saw Rhona putting on her helmet.

"Oh! I shouldn't come to-day, dear. You'll be choked with the dust."

"I've nothing else to do," she answered. "I'll come across on foot. Don't wait for me."

Cavell, followed by his two running boys, zig-zagged away amongst the thorn trees. Rhona, following, saw him pull up angrily before an extension of Dane's garden and skirt round it. Walking absent-mindedly, she followed his tracks in the sand; a powder of dust seemed to linger over them. The drought had sucked the land dry of colour. The grey trees stood dismally in the naked sand, and far away up the valley she could see the head of a dust-devil, dancing wickedly through the scrub.

Following the angry hoof-marks of her husband's pony, she reached the corner of Dane's new garden. Here she stopped dead. The half-made earthworks at the extreme angle had been roughly broken, and it was obvious who had done it. Rhona flushed. The damage was not great, and her first instinct was to stoop to repair it; her second to call up the attendant orderly, Aden, and set him to work, an unwilling labourer. She examined the garden for the first time with interest, and saw how ambitious was its scheme. A second horseman came trotting through the grey trees; came straight up to Rhona and caught her blushing and fidgeting like a naughty school-girl.

Dane was mystified. Cavell's wife directing work upon his garden. Then he saw the tell-tale tracks that had rounded his corner too sharply. Busy solving the problem, he failed to be amused by Rhona's guilty air.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Cavell, but why are you doing this?"

"I must apologise, Major Dane, for my husband. He was

in a hurry, and I am afraid he went rather carelessly, not noticing your work. I was repairing the damage."

To Dane this sounded so typical of Cavell as to be almost symbolic. Poor little yellow-haired woman, if she had to run around repairing all the damage the Colonel did when he was in a hurry to get there!

There succeeded a most unexpected feeling. It arose from seeing his garden attracting the care of a woman. An attention to himself might have passed him by, one to his garden went straight to his heart.

As soon as he had appreciated her apology, he said, "I have more reason for asking your pardon, Mrs. Cavell. The other night, when you asked me about my work, I should have answered you in good faith. Of course I am interested in irrigation, and for its own sake."

This was pleasing to Rhona and surprising. Dane was being what she called human. He was putting her own importance upon frank and fair dealing. She studied him quickly. He was sitting comfortably upon the most beautiful pony in Somaliland, a pure black dervish, bred by Haji Aden; mane and tail flowing, Somali fashion, shining like Chinese satin under the four o'clock sun, and rippling with strength like a jaguar. Dane's equipment was perfect—boots, saddle, bridle, whip. Only his shirt was shabby as ever, and his hot sandy hair was thrusting out from a helmet worn to ribbons and pushed incorrigibly far back on his head.

The Rifles said Dane had no sense of humour. Possibly it did not keep step with theirs, but he had enough to smile at this surreptitious inquisition. There is generally something attractive in a rare smile. Rhona was on the verge of responding to it. If two sincere people smile at each other in silence when they are alone it is as good as a declaration of friendship. But Rhona knew no half measures; people to her were either good or bad, as to a child; if she gave a tithe of friendship the rest followed with a rush. She had just achieved a practicable course by accepting her husband as good and all the other men as bad; now she clung instinctively to this hard-won position, Once make terms with the D.C. and her whole fortress might be undermined. She must dash back to her defences and drown the call to parley in the sound of guns.

"It was quite unnecessary," she said. (How long had they been staring at each other?) "And, in any case, I had quite forgotten the incident."

They were not very heavy guns, but they served the purpose.

sending the D.C. on over the river-bed, cursing himself for a fool.

He had every inducement to forget the encounter on the polo ground. There was every kind of polo from the good second-class play, learned by Cavell in England and India, to the dangerous amateurishness of Newsome. The ground was absurd, and they played in a mist of dust, withers high, but, even under these conditions, it was clear that Dane was in a class by himself. Rhona had often seen him mounted, but had never considered him as a horseman. He had no style. He had not learned his riding in a cavalry school, nor ever displayed it upon the hunting-field. He had ridden from his youth up, and, in many thousand miles of quiet trekking, his use of a horse had become instinctive. He sat loosely, stooping a little, and he out-rode and out-played Cavell with effortless persistence.

As the players, in a sweating, jostling crowd, rode near the little shelter where Rhona was sitting, to change ponies for the next chukker, she said to the Doctor, sitting beside her.

"Major Dane looks very smart to-day."

"Yes," he said, coughing with the dust. "He used to be a great player, I believe, and those trappings are the apple of his eye. I'm told he keeps them in a safe and soaps and polishes them himself."

They heard two breathless voices behind the tent.

"By Jove, sir, Dane's a bit of a surprise packet!"

"I can't play polo against Hais," came the answer. "That's what comes of having a Somali chief for a friend."

When the polo was finished the Doctor persuaded her to have a drink on the way home. As her easiest way was through the M.R. lines, and she expected to find Cavell, who had ridden on with the others, she agreed. When they reached the open space amongst the officers' tents, they were all standing or sitting by the trestle table, having a hurried drink before changing. Cavell was not there.

They all shouted to her to have a drink, and she sat down for a moment amongst the laughing crowd. The D.C. was sitting at the end of the table, and in the background, as cool as a princess, stood Hais. There was a good deal of chaffing about the drinks, and a hot argument as to whether Newsome had crossed Durell in the last chukker. When they all stood up, eager for a bath and a change, Dane said:

"One minute, if you'll excuse me, Mrs. Cavell. I suppose you must all have a bath a day, but I want to tell you that we may be in for a bad time, and I wonder if you'd mind going easy

on the water, and if you'd save your bath water I'll send a gang of prisoners round twice a day to collect it for the gardens. I'd be very grateful. Well, good night. By the way, Durell——"

The two went across to Hais, and Dane mounted, Durell walking beside him towards the river-bed.

The subalterns looked at each other, open-mouthed.

"I say," said Cheetham, "did you ever—I ask you! Really, Mrs. Cavell, I mean to say——"

"So our respected D.C. belongs to the great unwashed."

"Is that it? I often wondered what his club was."

"Keep our bath water! Think of it, Mrs. Cavell! Think of Newsome—and the cabbages! The thing's not hygienic."

"Here, what about your own bilge?" cried Newsome.

"Don't take any notice, Mrs. Cavell," said Rankin. "Delicacy was never our Newsome's strong suit. There is no more conservative creature than the English subaltern. Consider those heads—can you conceive of a new idea finding entrance?"

"They're quite nice heads," said Rhona lamely, "but, of course, I haven't seen inside them."

"The Somals can waste water as much as they like, but not the Rifles. The Somal can massacre the game, but the Rifles must be careful. Perhaps it's wise to be on good terms with the native, especially when he has ponies like Hais to give away."

"What do you mean?" asked Rankin.

Newsome realised he had gone too far, but he would not go back now.

"Well, didn't Haji Aden give Hais to Dane?"

"Oh! but, you see," said Grainger innocently, "Dane recommended him for a rise of pay. Or so they said in Berbera when I came through."

"Oh, shut up! said Cheetham, glancing at Rankin. The others followed the glance.

"If they must talk rotten nonsense in Berbera club, Grainger, there's no reason why we should do the same in the M.R. mess."

It was the most he could do before a woman. There was a pause, and then Grainger dropped his eyes and shut his mouth with the expression of a man who could answer if he chose. Rhona put an end to the silence by turning to go.

"I'll walk across with you," said Rankin. As they passed beyond the zariba, he said, "I apologise for those boys. I suppose they imagine you like that kind of thing."

Rhona, deliberately mistaking his reference, replied:

"Oh, I'm not deceived by their exaggerated way of talking

IAd it must be rather trying to have your bath interfered with. Inook forward to mine all day."

He led her by an unusual path out of the camp, and suddenly Rhona saw a group of natives squatting amongst the aloes.

"*Miskeen! miskeen!*" they cried as soon as they saw her, and stretched out their arms. Miskeen is the Somali word for beggar. There was an old man with a single tooth against his withered lips, and half a dozen dusty hags with a few foul rags about their stomachs. A couple of pot-bellied children with reedy legs and arms stared solemnly.

Rhona instantly turned away, but she was biting her lips.

"Have you got a few annas?" she said. "I have nothing on me."

"That's no use," he replied carelessly. "At least, it only prolongs the agony. Water is the only hope now."

Rhona coloured. She understood now the circuitous route and rebelled against the Adjutant for trying to teach her a lesson. They walked in silence until they came in sight of the bungalow, where she sent him back.

Cavell made no excuse for having ridden on without a word. He was in a very bad temper, and she knew quite well that the reason was not the headache he claimed. She marvelled at his chagrin and tried to love it as a relic of boyishness. After dinner, still recalling the afternoon, she asked him:

"Did Haji Aden really give Hais to Major Dane?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Is Haji Aden the native we saw having tea with him on his veranda that day?"

"Yes. But why do you ask?"

She twisted her delicate lips into an ugly shape.

"It's rather beastly, isn't it?"

"My dear, we all labour under the delusion that the British official is incorruptible. It's rather much to ask of human nature, but we get a nasty jar when we come upon our first case of graft. I remember I did, but you get hardened."

They were silent for a moment. Then she said, "I saw some 'miskeens' this afternoon."

"Did they bother you?"

"Oh, it isn't that! It's only that if there is very serious suffering, I think we . . . I ought to do something to help."

Cavell considered before replying, a practice which irked Rhona.

"It's just like you to want to help, dear," he said. "But

I don't see how you can. This is a hard country and the only way a white woman can live in it is by shutting her eyes to the hardness. It isn't as though you *could* help. The laws of nature are pitiless and invincible here. Any little sentimental efforts on your part would bruise you, and probably do harm rather than good. I remember a fellow in our regiment, when we were in Egypt, who had a mania for pushing the fat Gyppies off their donkeys and mounting their wives. It only meant the wives got hell when he turned his back. That's the way in the East, Rhona. The West can't help because it can't understand."

" Of course we're having a bad season, and of course there's suffering. But, bless your heart, these people are used to drought. They live on it. They're marvellously adapted to it, like their beasts, and if a few die off at bad times, it's the law of the land—the survival of the fittest—and you couldn't help them. You can't nourish starving people upon tinned fish and bottles of vermouth, and you can't create stock and milk by worrying. It's gone on for years, and it'll go on for years to come, so you might as well enjoy yourself for the short time you are here. Anyhow, the rains will fall soon, and then all will be well."

" That seems sense to me. But, in the interval, I suppose we ought to be careful with water."

" Oh, yes, we ought to be very careful."

For no reason that she could have explained, this answer delighted Rhona. She had not expected it. She had wronged him by thinking that his judgment could not rise above his hatred for the D.C. and all his works. It seemed to justify her in showing indifference towards the natives' troubles. Feeling that Cavell must be rewarded for such moderation, she crossed to where he was sitting, put her arms round his neck, caressed the spare face, and fancied that by such attentions, now growing rare, she had charmed out of him the devil of the afternoon.

But the rains disappointed Cavell's easy assumption, and the drought gripped Hargeisa in skeleton hands, with results from which Rhona turned away her eyes.

Dane saw, and Durell and Rankin ; even Cavell's face grew graver, as, day by day, he rode to the camp through the stricken valley. The sand had become a stinging powder that rose at a step and choked him. He had a well for the exclusive use of the Rifles, but stores of gram and hay were low, and he wae considering whether he should not take two companies of camels eastward, where there was a ghost of nourishment in the thick

bush. The native herds would have to give way to the M.R. beasts.

There was no litigation amongst the listless tribes, but Dane, out all day on a lean Hais, grew haggard. Hargeisa saw the worst of it. In the wide river-bed were the last wells; there, too, was the Hakim Sahib, whom God had afflicted with madness, who succoured beasts and human rubbish more useless than beasts. To these two forlorn hopes the tribesmen drove in their stock, and old men, women and children, cast out by their tribes, crawled in on their hands and knees. Dane organised a camp near his bungalow for the worst of the *miskeens* and spent the pittance allowed him by a distant Treasury on *jowari*, dates, and a few emaciated cows, from which, with great effort, a meagre supply of milk was obtained. He narrowed the area of salvation in his gardens, and fought for water for them like a demon. He kept his dusty gardeners at work in the bunded area against the day the rains should come to crown the enterprise.

Every afternoon dark clouds piled the sky, and burned away in the sunset with their wealth unshed. The oldest man in Hargeisa could remember no such delay; the land could not bear its people, and soon it was clear that the crisis was to be on a scale that would make Dane's efforts ridiculous.

Rankin worked for him at the Rifles, throwing himself into the terrible drama of thirst with a sort of feverish joy. Meeting Dane one morning in the river-bed, he cried:

"They've all given in, Major, even Newsome. Their bark was worse than their bite. So send your gang along tonight with some extra tanks."

"Right. What's the latest news about 'A' and 'B' camels? Is Cavell taking them out?"

"I think so. He's worried to death, but really the animals are in pretty good form considering. Hais looks a bit out of condition. How old is he?"

"Six, last month."

"How did you get hold of him?" Dane laughed. Rankin caught his eye and flushed. "All right, Dane, I don't want to know. The only thing that made me ask was that I wanted an answer to give one of those young swine."

"What do they say?"

"That Haji Aden gave him to you."

"It's true."

"Oh! well, there's something else to the story."

"Yes. He gave him to me before he was born. It was on

trek and the mother was kicked. They gave her up. I stayed behind and nursed her for three days and nights. I'm by way of being a good vet. Witness Hais."

"Thanks," said Rankin, and thought it over for a moment. "By the way, Major, what's Cheetham doing with your saddle and boots?"

"He's wanted them for weeks and I don't really need them. If he's fool enough to offer me two hundred rupees——"

"I see. By the way, Durell sends another ten rupees for your *miskeen* fund. He sayst he man's mad, but we must bear with our friends in their affliction. Here's fifteen from Cheetham and Newsome, and twenty from Grainger. Here's twenty from me. Don't thank me. I'm only doing it to prolong your little fight against Africa, because it's so damned funny. What'll you buy?"

"It'll pay for *jowari* ordered from Berbera."

They were silent for a moment, and in repose both their faces showed the strain under which they were living.

"Got anything out of the lady?" asked Rankin.

"That's my affair," said Dane.

"Does she save you any water?"

"I haven't asked her."

"Oh yes, you have! She heard what you said at the Rifles that day. By God! Dane, I'd like to teach that woman a lesson. There's nothing more callous than a woman when you get below her shallow emotionalism. She turns away her dark eyes when you shoot a partridge—I've seen her—but she sits tight and smiles through this abomination, the hard, yellow-haired little devil!"

"Yes. It is rather funny," agreed Dane.

"Funny! Oh, Lord!" Rankin turned away and pounded his way through the white, hot sand, while Dane walked across to the *miskeen* camp.

Rankin said to himself, "Of course it hurts him. He's made that way."

"Hi! Rankin," cried Grainger from the bank of the nullah. "The Colonel's going out to Gabileh with 'A' and 'B' camels this evening."

"Oh! Does he want me to go?"

"No; Cheetham, Newsome and I are going. But he wants to see you."

"Where is he?"

"Either down at the wells or at his bungalow. Here, take my pony and look around."

"Thanks."

Rankin mounted and rode up the nullah. When he reached the bungalow, Cavell was out, but Rhona was lying on the veranda with a novel. She had no idea where her husband was. Rankin, however, deliberately dismounted, gave the pony to the kitchen boy, with orders to hold him in the lee of the cook-house, and came on to the veranda.

Rhona, who looked white and tired, mechanically offered him a drink.

"Not at this hour, thank you, Mrs. Cavell," he said, fixing her with his blue eyes in the way which always embarrassed her. He came and stood right over her. "I want to know if you will give me a subscription towards Major Dane's *miskeen* camp?"

At this touch of the whip Rhona sat rigid in her chair and said:

"I understood the camp was run on public money."

Rankin laughed.

"I suppose it has cost twice as much as the Government grant."

The condemnation in Rankin's attitude made Rhona feel hot to the tips of her ears.

"I don't see much point in private people saving the Government expense. As soon as they know the seriousness of the drought, they will make up the deficit."

"Will they? Meanwhile Dane has to sell his saddle and bridle to keep the camp going another day. It isn't only that. You're the one woman here, and there's hell going on all round. Do you think it counts for nothing that you withhold your support from Dane in the magnificent fight he's putting up? Good morning, Mrs. Cavell; I came over specially to say that." He turned and went.

The gloves were off now with a vengeance. No man except Cavell had ever spoken so brutally to Rhona in her life. She would as soon have expected a man to strike her in the face. It was a very new experience to Rhona to be thus rebuked, and she was still trembling with anger at Rankin's manner as much as at his words when Cavell came. He ran in and kissed her hurriedly.

"Look here, darling, I've got to leave you for a few days. I'm moving two companies out to Gabileh, and as I don't want any trouble with the people there, I'm going myself. I would take you, but you'd hate it just now, and I want you to have a really good trek when the rains have broken. You'll be all

right. I've made arrangements for some police and the doctor will keep an eye on you. I must hurry." He went into the bedroom, but reappeared a moment later in the doorway with a radiant face.

"By the way, I've some good news. I think I'm going to get Hais for six hundred rupees. Anyhow, Dane wants to sell. I haven't time to see him so I've left the money with the Doctor and full powers of attorney. By George! Rhona, it's great. There's not a pony like him in Somaliland."

"How lovely!" she replied, but she spoke thoughtfully.

When he had gone a deep loneliness settled upon Rhona. She sat on the veranda, hating the desolate view across the scrub and up the nullah that she knew so well. A sudden longing for comradeship came to her. She dared not go out into this alien and suffering district, whose agony was no more real to her than a dream. She would go up the nullah. She would meet no one but silent Somalis: the few white men would be about their routine, indifferent to her. In her was a life, a warm and many-coloured thing that no one, not even Cavell, knew. A woman's personality, her dreams and culture, gentleness and human love, all withered in this stark country. She looked round, hating it and knowing the impotence of her hatred.

Away beyond the barbed-wire fence was a sound of wailing. Rhona, sick with resentment at the call upon her emotions, looked up. A figure crawled out of the bushes and slowly stood erect. Two policemen standing at the entrance jabbered and gesticulated, but the figure did not retreat. Rhona could hardly see what was happening, until one of the men roughly pushed the intruder, who fell flat at his feet.

"Boy!" Rhona called, springing up.

"Memsahib!" It was Hassan.

"Go! See what is there. Say policeman bad man to hit *miskeen*."

"Memsahib, Colonel Sahib, he tell police *no* dirty *miskeens* to come near de house. Policeman do what Colonel Sahib say."

"Nonsense! Go at once, Hassan, and fetch that *miskeen*."

"Ayweh, Memsahib."

Rhona put on her helmet, drew a deep breath and walked into the sunlight. Hassan half-dragged the *miskeen* to her.

It was a woman, and Rhona looked down at her as she squatted at her feet. Starvation is hideous and Rhona met it face to face. She had seen a shrivelled Englishwoman of ninety-six,

but this was worse, and this might be young. Legs and arms were like sticks upon which the hands and feet seemed unnaturally large. The head, too, cannot shrink, the skull remained wrapped in a crumpled mask. The eyes were bleared to scales, and the lips drawn back from the gums. The neck had shrunk so that every bone and pipe in it could be seen taut beneath the skin that sagged like that of a vulture. Every bone of the skeleton stood clear and seemed about to pierce the skin. The breasts hung limp, like empty pockets; the loins were clotted with the last noisome rags. It did not seem possible that such emaciation could sustain life, yet life was there, stripped of all that makes man's life worthy, yet enduring, struggling beyond hope or reason. The eyes that met Rhona's had no humanity left in them; they were like the eyes of a bird of prey, bleared and blinking under horny lids, with no meaning in them but a demand.

The sight tore at Rhona's heart. It was an agony. She forgot for a moment that this was a human being. It seemed an offence against her kind that a thing could be so loathsome and yet remain a human being. Now the creature was mumbling through lips like leather and plucking at her like a bird. Something turned in the pit of her stomach and she stepped back, fearing she would be sick. She looked desperately about her.

A horseman stood in the gateway. It was Major Dane. He dismounted and came towards her with Hais following like a dog and nozzling his shoulder.

"I just came along to see if you were all right."

"Look!" said Rhona, but she did not look herself.

"I'm sorry you've been bothered." He knelt beside the woman and talked to her quietly in Somali, supporting her a little. Rhona gave a little gasp as his bared arm touched the woman's back. The two policemen watched, smiling; Hassan stood still and sullen. Hais, bending his head beside his master, made a little jingling with his curb chain. Rhona had often prepared herself to meet important moments, and they had come and gone and proved shams. Now one came and took her unawares. She watched Dane perform what was to her as great a marvel as if he had struck the sand at her feet with his riding-whip and a fountain had burst out.

He lifted the frightful figure reverently—that was the word that came into Rhona's mind. He spoke quietly to Hais, and lifting the light body, placed it upon his saddle and held it there. Rhona involuntarily shivered as the tattered and filthy thing

touched the bright pony and the bright saddle. Putting his free hand upon Hais' neck to guide him, Dane turned with difficulty.

"I'll just walk her across to the camp, Mrs. Cavell."

"One moment," Rhona stepped forward, "is there anything I can do to help—*anything?*"

Dane's eyes sank before hers and he pulled his fingers twice through Hais' mane before he answered:

"Nothing at all, thank you, Mrs. Cavell."

She watched them go. They looked so funny as the *miskeen* swayed like a scarecrow, and he walked clumsily against the pony, that she nearly burst out laughing. The police and Hassan were laughing. Had a British officer any right to make himself absurd like that? In a black country the white man's philanthropy should not run to extravagance, almost to indecency. Cavell and most other Englishmen saw that the natives were simply superior animals and treated them as such, firmly and kindly. What business had Dane to make himself unique by treating a mangy Somali hag as though she were an Englishwoman?

But all the time as she went back to the house and as, instinctively, she changed for dinner, and as she sat down at the table laid for one, another voice was speaking, saying a great many strange things which she did not wish to hear.

"Supposing it is not he who is absurd, but we! Suppose there should be a God, and that He has not got such an acute sense of humour as we have! When Dane knelt by that woman you thought about the Good Samaritan, who, after all, rather overdid things. I daresay if Christ had been a subaltern in an English regiment He would have been thought rather eccentric in the Mess. And even supposing there is no God, and Africa holds nothing but what you can see, sand and stones and cruelty, a wicked sun and a sky of steel, what then? Isn't it just as good to be a fool as a beast? At least, it does no one any harm but yourself."

She picked up a two months' old picture paper, but the voice continued, and the print became meaningless.

"He has been in Africa for years, yet he isn't afraid of it. He doesn't try to shut it out. He serves it and lets it torture him. What has happened to you, whom people at Chantrey used to think rather kind and unselfish? You've been inhuman People—real live people—have been dying all round you and you wouldn't see it, wouldn't know it."

"But," she tried to silence the voice, "I can't admit all

this. If *he* is good, then we are all bad—I'm bad, and Jack. It cuts at the root of everything."

"Let it cut," said the voice; "be your true self at last. You've been dying all these months. You're nearly dead. Show some courage. Open your eyes and go forward. Adapting yourself to your husband is not the only virtue in life."

After dinner, Dane, who was very tired, lay on a camp chair, with his dog sprawling upon one side and his cheetah upon the other, and read and enjoyed a very unsubtle love-story. It took him to the wilds of California, where the hero rescued his lover from the hands of bandits and galloped away from their lair under a hail of bullets. But the heroine had golden hair that tossed like a wave on the wind. He put down the book and gnawed his pipe.

Cavell's wife had chosen to stand out, and stand out she should. He was damned if he would admit her to fellowship on the score of a moment's disgust. But had he any right to a pride that other people paid for? Cavell's wife was rich, and he had turned away sixty *miskeens* that day. His mind, painstaking and just, worried its way a little further. Had he any right to judge the depths of her impulse or to assume what had held her aloof so long? He sighed, stood up and moved stiffly to the threshold. It was late and he was tired, but——

Out between the bushes there was a footstep, and a figure, pale under a young moon, came uncertainly out of the shadows. Pulling at his pipe, Dane watched. It was Mrs. Cavell. He sprang out to meet her.

"Is anything the matter? Really, Mrs. Cavell, you should not have come along here alone."

"I have my revolver," she said. They sat down.

"I was just thinking of coming over to see how you were."

"Oh! . . . I'm all right, thank you." They came clumsily to a halt. The long pause weighed upon them both like lead. They were such immeasurable strangers. With an effort almost physical, Rhona forced the intimate topic.

"Major Dane, I quite understand why you refused to let me help to-day. I know I didn't deserve it. I want to tell you I'm sorry and to ask you to do a great kindness to me." She looked up, expecting protest or embarrassment, but he was gazing at her with interest, and at once she knew that she could go straight ahead with what she had to say.

"I don't know why I've stood outside. I'd better not begin to explain that or why I didn't want to let myself like you. Only—well—I've brought this."

She fumbled a moment and then there was a crackling bit of paper between them.

"All right," Dane said, after a moment. "I'll use it." He frowned over it in the moving lamplight, read the sum and slowly understood its meaning. Just such a cheque he was to receive next day.

"Six hundred rupees!" he said slowly. "Mrs. Cavell, has this anything to do with Hais?"

"Please don't look upon it in that way," said Rhona, suddenly amazed at her own folly in putting down the exact sum.

"But I must look upon it in that way." Dane thought it out. "You didn't hear, by any chance, that I was selling Hais to the Doctor? Your husband is going to have him."

"I know. But *he* needn't know. The thing's not settled yet, is it? You love Hais, don't you?"

"He's a good pony. But what does it matter to you?"

"I love horses. This would be a crime. And I understand —more than you think. Listen, Major Dane, if you won't promise to keep Hais, I'll tear up this cheque. If you will promise, I will double it, and you shall have every drop of water I can save for you at the bungalow."

Dane thought for a long time, but there was no tension in the silence. It was only afterwards that he remarked how completely his awkwardness had vanished, how certain he had felt of what he should say to her.

"First of all, one thing. Can you afford this?"

"Easily?"

"Secondly, can you keep it from your husband?"

"I must."

"Then I'll close with you on one condition. That you come out." He indicated the valley with a short gesture. "Money is not enough to give, nor sympathy for myself and Hais, nor even water. You must see the camp and, if necessary, you must see death."

When Dane said this Rhona had a most strange sensation. It was as though she was an organ suddenly touched by a master-hand, and knew for the first time that she had a whole range of deep and wonderful notes that no one had ever struck before. So handled, of what glorious music might she not be capable in the future. She closed her eyes in the dusk: she was full of amazement and gratitude. Her sense of staleness and failure dropped away from her. There was beauty and nobility in the world yet, and in herself.

She looked at him and was disappointed. He seemed unfamiliar, an ordinary khaki-shirted Englishman. Yet a minute ago he had been in spiritual contact with her, closer than any she had known. He, on his part, was too shy to look at her. He had been aware of the contact, but her exterior he could not yet assimilate. Unused to women, the very shape of her femininity, her goldness and whiteness and smallness, checked and puzzled him.

She became shy again, altered the cheque, caressed the cheetah, smoothed her hair, then rose to go. They walked together through the bush. The attendant night bred thoughts in them that rushed to their lips, but they did not say them. Instead they spoke carefully, a little afraid of what had come before, and wondering if the other had shared the experience.

At the entrance to the bungalow Dane stood still.

"Good night," she said, and then risked saying what she had been inventing all the way. "Thank you for taking the money. In doing that you did something for me."

"Yes, I know," he said, and she went back into her room, and sat upon her bed for an hour, staring straight in front of her, thinking nothing but waiting for the tumult and the throbbing in her heart and brain to wear itself out so that she might lie down and try to go to sleep.

XIV

RHONA waited all the next morning expecting that Dane would call for her, but only the Doctor came, and a gang of prisoners, with chains clanking between their knees and, on their shoulders, petrol tins, in which to take away her waste water. She was not rebuffed. No doubts about Dane worried her: if he did not call for her it was because he expected her to go to him. It was many months before she had believed that a man meant what he said to her.

At half-past two she changed into her habit and rode down the nullah. She had never been out before four o'clock in Hargeisa, but Dane would be at work and she was in no mood to spare herself. Two policemen rode behind her upon bony mules. As she passed the M.R. lines she heard Durell singing, but did not know that it was out of joy at being relieved of Cavell's presence. She circled the *miskeen* camp, rather timidly, but Dane was not there. She rode past the court, but the diminutive Goanese clerk in the doorway sent her on towards the village. She had never been there before, and as, approaching, she saw the coloured crowds moving amongst the *gurgis* and in the wide river-bed, her heart beat faster. Skirting Dane's last garden, she halted on the bank, several hundred curious eyes remarking her. One of the policemen pointed to where Dane's orderly held Hais in the scant shadow of a mimosa thorn.

As far as Rhona could see up the river-bed there were animals. They stood in groups, according to their kind. The emaciation of the camels was the most startling. Their humps had fallen into a mere framework, and their ribbed sides were like wattled walls, thatched with mangy skin. The ponies stood quite still, in a dusty rout, drooping their heads towards the limp sand which covered their fetlocks. Their eyes were bloodshot and glazed, and their bones thrust out fantastically against the sinking hide. The dun-coloured cattle had humps which wagged when

they moved and the pouchy skin below their throats hung down like empty sacks. The black-headed sheep breathed with quick pants. The goats, wiry and independent little scavengers, showed least trace of the thirst.

Rhona, calculating the mass of pain, felt there was something strange about the beasts beyond their skeleton shapes. Suddenly she grasped it. In her own countryside, at fairs and markets, she had always connected large crowds of animals with goading, shouting and bleating. These creatures were all silent. They stood quite still. They were waiting. If there was any water for them, they would live ; if not, they would die where they stood.

Obedient to the D.C., Rhona did not turn away ; she looked up and down until the first nausea passed. The policeman beside her made an explanation, following his glance she saw Dane, choked in the throng at the brink of the well. She rode up to him. He saluted her, and together they looked down the well.

A deep funnel in the sand was what she saw, with five ledges scooped at intervals on which stood five men tossing two vessels up and down. Leaning right over she could see in the cavernous depths the light pitching on naked limbs, and out of the pit boomed a song by whose rhythm they swung their vessels. There was a more evil sound, that of grating stones at the bottom of the well, and Rhona saw that the stuff the man at the lip was pouring into a trough was like chocolate-coloured mud.

She turned to Dane with horror in her eyes, and he nodded.

" What does this mean ? "

" The end of my gardens, for one thing," he said.

" On what principle are you rationing this ? " she asked. " How do you decide between men and animals ? "

" Well, you see, man here is a parasite upon the animals. That complicates matters."

He did not seem anxious to talk ; he turned to the cattle-owners and chiefs beside him. He walked away from her amongst the animals, arguing, pointing, ordering. She sat patiently while the scene bit itself into her mind to remain with her all her life, and often to enter her dreams. Her compassion was like a spear piercing her. The combined suffering of all the thousand animals seemed to hang in the air about her, combined into a storm-cloud hanging over her, weighing down upon her. Her thoughts went further to all the world's innocent and tortured animals, until, overloaded by the sum of their misery, she reached out with angry prayer to some power that might explain and compensate.

When Dane joined her and they rode back towards the gardens she took courage to search his face for some consolation there. With dismay she noticed the tired lines. She said:

"How do you bear it?"

He did not answer directly.

"Rankin came down this morning and brooded over it. As we rode away, he said, 'Dane, when I look at those animals, there seems to be a question in their eyes, "Who is it that torments us?" And you can't answer the question. Conceivably some philosophy, with talk of free-will and original sin, could be stretched to justify a Creator who feeds his people with dust while they pray to Him. But what of the animals, who are innocent of will-power, dumb and defenceless?'"

"Did you feel like that?"

"Ye-es." He drawled the affirmative doubtfully so that it was almost a negative. "I suppose it does get you like that at first. I've given up asking questions. The answers are so many and so unsatisfactory. Meanwhile, the job remains, a pretty obvious bit of spade-work. Here we are at the first garden. You can ride in: you can't do any harm now. I made this four years ago. You'd hardly know it was a garden now, of course."

He laughed as she looked up and down the dusty patches, dry and grooved as if children had been playing in the sandhills. Withered sticks and tags of desiccated vegetation stood in lines and groups.

"The desert, you see," he went on, "doesn't take long in reclaiming its own. I had to decide between my experiments and my certainties. What you see here was, by way of being, an orchard. I had young orange trees, limes, and, in that corner, peaches and pomegranates. It's rather a pity, because this year would have proved a good deal about them.

"However, over there, you see I have a whole plantation of indigenous, but slow-growing trees which, thanks to the improvidence of the Somal and the multiplication of his goats, are almost extinct—*gob*, *awbul*, cedar and tamarind. I have a plan for boarding these out with reliable natives, paying bounties, giving prizes and so on. In twenty years you would already see a difference in this valley; in forty you wouldn't know it. So I kept them."

"Is that what you wanted the water for?" she asked, her cheeks burning.

"Amongst other things." He walked his pony forward and

gave instructions to the Arab gardener, who stooped impassively above the fragments of his work.

He made no offer to enter the second garden, skirting the zariba.

"And this?" she said.

"Finished," he replied, "for the time being." He spoke lightly. The disaster was too much the familiar of his heart for sight of it or speaking of it to affect him.

Men were working in the open space where the bunds were building. She drew up and looked about her.

"Tell me about it," she said.

He talked and she listened, judging him rather than his plan. Here, she saw, was the secret of his hopefulness; here his idealism crystallised in the solid form of a promised land. She saw what he pictured, and knew that, by closing his eyes, he could see the river-banks patched with crops and clustered with trees. She could not see it. She could see the desert and the sun that seemed so small in that empty sky. They were eternal, and would this dreaming strip of humanity arrest their tyranny? She felt a great pity for him.

"Don't place all your hopes upon it," she said quietly.

"Why do you say that?"

"If it should fail!"

He laughed, quoted a line of "Macbeth," and went on to point out just what would happen when the rains came. There was the look-out man's platform—there the flood-gates—there the overflow channel.

She listened and made comments with no fear of their sounding foolish. He neither asked if she were interested nor apologised for his long disquisition.

They rode on the few steps further to the *miskeen* camp. The *miskeens* squatted in the shade of the zariba or lay prone in the dark grass huts. Crowds of women and children crouched outside the charmed circle, wailing monotonously, and stretching out their arms. Dane walked about amongst these with one of the policemen, questioning and examining them. Now and then the policeman turned a prostrate figure over with his foot so that the Hakim Sahib might better see its condition. He would call to his fellow on guard at the gate, and one of the selected cases would totter or crawl into the camp. Rhona counted twenty of them. Then Dane gave an order to the police at which a renewed wail broke from the rejected. They whined, snarled and screamed, but the police drove them back from the zariba.

Dane walked into the enclosure. She heard him say " Four," and shivered, but dismounted and followed him. He was looking at a prone figure twisted amongst a heap of rotten red calico. Rhona was surprised that she felt no horror, though she knew this was a corpse, the first she could ever remember having seen. She only knew a relief that the thing was dead, that one at least of these frightful mummies was beyond feeling.

She could hardly mount her horse. She was exhausted, almost as if someone had been flogging her. She felt a sudden resentment against Dane. He had had his way: she had agonised at the sight of the sufferings of Hargeisa, and what good had it done? Phrases of Cavell's speech came to her mind and she was tempted to fling their commonsense at her mentor.

Dane had certainly no idea of what he had inflicted upon the Colonel's wife. He alternated between arrogance and humility. He was arrogant when he felt that he was speaking for a cause or a principle, and humble when he had a moment's doubt of his right so to speak. He had such a doubt now and was turning it over in his mind, when she said in a faint and petulant voice:

" I must go home. Good afternoon! "

All the evening she took herself to task for the easy intimacy she had fallen into with her husband's enemy. Her conscience was a little appeased by the efforts she had made; her emotions were too tired to spend themselves any more upon the men and animals of Hargeisa, and Cavell's case re-asserted itself in her mind.

Torn between these fighting impulses she lay awake far into the night, and awoke unrefreshed, but determined to take a middle course. She wrote a courteous note to Dane, offering to keep six *miskeen* children fed and housed in her back premises, and asked him to send her only three-quarters of her water-ration. That accomplished, she wrote a long letter to Cavell, in which she told him with some deliberation that the D.C. had shown her the gardens and the *miskeen* camp.

" The great thing in this country," she told herself, " is not to think about it. It doesn't bear thinking about. Jack is quite right. I tried to shut out all view of the monster, but yesterday it forced itself upon me. Now I've thrown a sop to Cerberus. I can't do more than I have done. I'm human. Major Dane isn't. He's not normal. He lives alone and he's in love with a garden. He's a crank. I must think that. If I let myself be drawn by him to see things from his angle life will become impossible. And now I will forget everything but

my novel, forget who I am, where I am, and all these tiring problems."

But in the afternoon Rankin suddenly arrived, and, in the friendliest manner possible, suggested that he, Durell and Dane should all come to pot-luck with her that night. It was not in Rhona to discourage an act of faith like this, especially when he put it to her that it would be a kindness to Durell and Dane, who needed taking out of themselves. It was clear that a chance word from the D.C. had changed the Adjutant's attitude towards her; he stood, leaning his short form against the veranda, rumpling his black hair and grinning, for all the world as if they had been friends for years.

The dinner was, on the whole, a great success. The men were different creatures in the absence of Cavell. After the strain of the day they revelled in reaction. No deep chord was struck; Rhona felt no invisible hostilities or political undercurrents, and in an atmosphere of simple friendliness threw off her defences and dreamed that this was one of the old parties at Chantrey.

They played bridge, at which Dane annoyed her equally as partner and opponent by his erratic calling. After that he performed card tricks, a type of entertainment she loathed. It was a curious relief to look down upon him. Then Durell described the scenes in which, one after another, the officers had abandoned their baths, and she was obliged to admit he was an excellent mimic. Finally, with a lack of embarrassment Rhona thought would have been impossible in an Englishman, Rankin, in his rich voice, read her two of her favourite poems, Browning's "Saul" and Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale." She enjoyed it in spite of an instinctive knowledge that every friendly moment passed with these men meant a moment of trouble stored up for the future. She did not guess that Rankin had arranged the party for her sake, and to reward her for what he knew she must have suffered the day before.

The moment's forgetfulness made the morrow harder. It was an intolerable day. She could not employ herself with her *miskeen* children. They ate and drank what she gave them, but, for the rest, sat listlessly in the sand, nursing their swollen stomachs and staring at her with lustreless eyes.

She rode out at four o'clock. The skeleton of a camel in the nullah explained the din of hyænas in the night. She rode aimlessly away from the camp and the village. The sand whirled about her knees; soon her sweating pony was caked with dust. A tall tree beside the nullah was loaded with vultures. In the distance they looked like some Gargantuan fruit; at close

quarters they seemed like a company of vile old men, solemn and yet ribald, gathered for an obscene rite. Some dirty work must be afoot. In a gust of loathing she rode up to the tree and hurled her riding-crop into the midst of the bloated company. They blinked their horny lids, ponderously launched themselves one by one, and with great, slow strokes of their wings thrashed their way to the next tree. Then she saw something dark brown humped amongst the aloes, saw the tatter of rags . . .

"Oh, God!" she muttered, then made a violent gesture. "Is it dead, Aden?"

"Ayweh, Memsahib."

If she ordered the men to bury it in the sand, and if they obeyed her, they would only scamp their work and the hyænas would gorge. The vultures must have their way. There was no defeating them. Fifty yards away they watched her, motionless on their branches, waiting. She turned and rode back.

"I do not think," she said to herself as she flung off her helmet and sat on the bed, her hair matted round her brow, "that I can bear it any longer. Why did Jack leave me now to think and think? Does he imagine that I am made of stone? I can't bear it. If there was any reason in it, I could. But it's all so silly. It's no good breaking your heart when you are powerless to help. All they taught me as a child—'Not one sparrow falleth to the ground'—'Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden'—that's all very well in Europe, but here—Who is closing that sky? Who decrees that the rain shall come not now but two—three—five days later, so that the pitiful little things that He has made shall be tortured to death? There can be no God. Or else that awful thought I had in the storm at Berbera is true, that this is a land where God does not rule, but only the spirit of Africa—cruel, lazy, stupid, from which there is no appeal. Not even to be able to pray—that is awful."

That day passed, and the next, and the next. Every afternoon there was a cloud in the sky and the Somals lay prostrate in the sand, calling upon Allah. Rhona stayed indoors, living upon the minimum of milk and water, and growing whiter and whiter. When she went outside the air seemed charged with the agony that was abroad. She felt choked. The land was visibly dying. She thought she could hear the long-drawn breath of a thirst that was ending in death.

On the fourth day the rains broke. All day the Somals watched the sky. Cloud after cloud rolled up above the trees.

They were the colour of steel. They were like a stormy sea standing upon end, a sea that at last washed out the sun. The gloom that followed the sun's disappearance was strange; it had the effect of a sudden silence. The sea spread, it deepened and leaned over the land, more and more imminent. Then Rhona heard a staccato tapping upon the roof. Was it possible? She ran to the door. A dozen huge drops splashed the veranda step. Then the rain held off, as to torment the land a moment longer. The thunder stumbled nearer; the sky leaned over her, nearer, nearer, until it burst open and the rain came.

It was huge in particle, yet close in texture, and it drove straight into the house. Everywhere it found cracks between the parched boards of the roof and blotched through the mud walls. But little Rhona cared! It was life coming out of the skies. Outside, the natives lay in it, wallowed in it.

Rhona was recalled by a crisis. The waters raced down the slope towards the river-bed. Already they had carried with them the earth of the garden and the withered stumps that had been flowers. Now they were collecting in the yard and threatening to submerge the house. The boys set to work on a dam, but that threatened to fail. The order to bail was given. All hands were called. The sweeper dipped a bucket; Aden, chuckling, worked with a basin; Hassan splashed up and down with a kettle; Ali, the gardener, with his watering-can. Then the cook emerged from the kitchen, grinning with his one tooth and flourishing his frying-pan, while the little *miskeen* children not to be outdone, seized hold of some saucers and trotted up and down, adorned only by their dazzling smiles. It was a delightful mess. The boys swilled through the mud in their bare feet, soaked cloths gummed to their loins, naked limbs polished in the rain. Rhona watched, gurgling with laughter.

It was almost twilight when the rain slackened and died, and Rhona went out into a changed world. The sand was white no longer. It was dark, scored and sluiced by the running water. The dust was quenched; every tree and aloe was drenched and dripping. Rhona, wearing a waterproof and strong shoes for the first time in Somaliland, slid and squelched in her efforts to reached her object before the darkness came. Eagerly she rounded the *miskeen* camp without a glance, and then stood still, catching her breath. A lake—a lake in Hargeisa! All the secondary earthworks were covered and within the wide arms of the outermost bunds a great sheet of water lay encircled. Tears came into Rhona's eyes as she looked. Dear water! Precious, cool, healing, life-giving water! How gracious

it would be to the dusty-eyed animals and upon the cracked tongues of the *miskeens!* She leaned across the bund and dipped her fingers. It was like a sacrament.

Even as she watched the maze of inner earthworks topped the sinking water and she remembered that this miracle was a very practical one. Was it going well? Did anything threaten its success? Where was Major Dane? She looked about her. He was there, but much too busy to notice her. Soaked to the skin, his sodden helmet still sticking to the back of his head, he splashed about along the margin while a group of natives wielded their spades under his orders, strengthening the outer works, now here, now there. She longed to go up and honour his achievement, but she respected his absorption. At last he stood still. Evidently no more could be done for the moment. He posted guards at each side, and gave last instructions to the look-out man upon his platform. Yet he seemed loath to go away; he stood, legs apart, head thrown back, gazing at the work.

Rhona went up to him; a closer view revealed more disorder. His labours had quite evidently taken him down on his hands and knees in the slime; a spray of mud had hardened upon his cheek; his back glistened through his soaked tussore shirt.

"It's held!" she said, with a lack of ceremony, which had seemed inevitable with him since the night she paid her subscription.

"Oh yes," he replied, "it's held. Once to-night is safely past, the worst is over. You see, the bunds aren't set yet—aren't packed. They'll get stronger. This is the critical time. Do you know how many inches of water there are there?"

"No," she said, trying to tune her feminine mind from the general to the particular.

"Six to seven inches. Half an inch fell in one and three-quarter hours."

"It's wonderful, but it can't save the dead or the dying. Think of dying now with all this round you! But I oughtn't to think or say that." She hesitated; the man was so practical and commonplace in his triumph, yet she must speak. "I want to congratulate you. It's a splendid achievement."

"You see," he said, as if in self-defence, "I always had a notion that everyone who comes here might contribute one thing to Somaliland. One man, one idea. Every fellow has got some new idea no one else has got, and if he worries long enough at it something will come of it in the end. I thought

of this long ago, but I felt sure that experts must have considered it and dismissed the idea. You see—it was so absurdly simple. So I gave up talking about it, and got into a groove with my work. Then a few years ago we had a bad year—not as bad as this, but pretty bad—and I suddenly got savage and worked it all off on the Governor—not this man—and he helped me a bit. That's when I started those gardens, so that I should know what to go nap on when I began this business."

"Well, aren't you satisfied?"

"There's only one thing wrong. This ought to be five hundred instead of five acres."

"Why isn't it?"

This question immediately made a difference in him.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, and took off his sopping helmet, which he vainly tried to re-mould.

"I say!" she exclaimed, "you're frightfully wet. Surely you ought to go and change. You might get fever."

"Oh yes. Thanks for reminding me," he said jerkily, and upon this they separated, he repeating to himself in amazement that this woman to whom he had been talking was Cavell's wife, she looking back at the lake, yearning over it and over the man who had made it.

It was dark before she had threaded her way home through the bush, but almost at once a great moon was lying, yellow as a marigold, on the rim of the thorns.

Suddenly a strange noise startled her. Thunder? It was not thunder; it was like no sound she had ever heard. The boys shouted behind the house, and Hassan ran, in swinging a hurricane lamp, his teeth flashing, his face working. The river was coming down! Rhona put on her coat, sped out to the brink of the cliff and looked right and left up the two crooked arms of the nullah. One side caught the tangled slant of the moon, the other was in shadow. Calling to Derea to bring the lamp, she picked her way through the aloes on the dim slope to where the bank was almost on a level with the river-bed. Nearer and nearer came the sound. It was like many thousand voices talking. In the air was a wild excitement.

"Ai-ee!" said Hassan.

A long finger of foam writhed down the centre of the channel; it twisted, finding its way, as though the oncoming flood had thrown forward a tentacle. Then came a wave of foam, pursuing it, catching it, scrambling over it, a disturbed flood of water, growing deeper, wave upon wave. There was nothing of the steady flow of the real river, continuous in its accustomed

channel. It was as if the water had been thrust, maddened and bewildered, whither it knew not, and wild with fear and anger, jostled by, resisting, contorting, and biting great lumps out of the strange banks which confined it. The air was full of a rushing sound. The lamp flickered tremblingly upon the torrent, which, in its convulsions, thrashed up the sandy bed and became turgid. Now and then trees or branches raced violently by, or drowned beasts scrabbling over and over in the main stream. Once Rhona thought she saw a snake borne past, lashing and snapping. She stepped back as a great wave came swilling over the bank.

Upon the other side lamps moved and jerked, throwing patches of light upon khaki figures and upon the river. That must be Rankin and Durell hailing the water with dancing, shouts and horse-play. Further down the bank another lamp stood still, and she guessed that Dane was there. As the moon cleared the earth, turning, as it climbed from gold to silver, the waters reached their height and began to abate. Rhona put out her lamp and climbed the slope to the bungalow. Far up the river the hyænas, cut off from their homes, could be heard dismally howling.

Rhona went to bed. She looked back over the day, the rain, the lake, the river. In after years none of these things left the strongest impression. Five minutes after the rains broke there had come into the house an acrid and never-to-be-forgotten smell. It came from the sun-smitten earth, which, in its parchedness, was drinking and giving thanks. It did not drink quietly as the moist Western earth drinks, but with a long intaken breath, its burned skin cracking open and drawing the water into its wounds. The smell was quite different from the fragrance of our summer days after a shower has fallen, wholesome with wet grasses and dripping foliage, and sweet with scattered pollens. Africa is a land of strong emotions, and those who live upon her breast are shaken by them. So now the drenched earth exhaled a breath that was strong and sultry, and struck the nose and throat like the fumes of a heavy wine, an expiration of triumph from the million germs of life that now stirred and strove beneath the surface.

. . . . . .

Worn out by emotion and soothed with relief, Rhona went early to bed and fell asleep at once. She never heard the sudden shouting up the river-bed and all the confusion that followed. She did not know that, as she fell asleep, two horsemen topped

the crest behind and stared in amazement at the sheet of water in the valley, white and startling beneath the moon.

"A lake, by George!"

"They've had an almighty storm here. And never a damned drop have we seen."

Presently there were hurrying figures in the valley and long-distance shouting.

"Hi! Is that you, Cavell? Have you got the ponies and camels with you?"

"They're coming on. Why?"

"Have they been well watered? If not, for God's sake take them round another way. They'll rush the water."

"Oh, rot! Dane. They've got a guard."

The voices dropped as Cavell rode forward.

"I tell you they've got plenty of drivers."

"They'll rush them. How far are they behind?"

"I don't know."

A dark tide of mounted men streamed towards the soppy river-bed, two hundred yards up.

"I say, Cavell, stop those fellows, and put 'em round the bund till the drivers have passed."

"I can't. They're dead tired. They've had the hell of a day, and it isn't their job."

"Look here, Cavell, this is no laughing matter. The works have got to be protected. Do you want me to call up the police to beat off your animals?"

"Call up your damned police! It's not my job to protect your private gardens. Why don't you put up a fence——"

"You're mad! There are some things that even a swine like you can't do, and this is one. If you do, by God, I'll make you pay for it!" He turned and raced towards the police lines.

Cavell sat still a moment, staring up at the bright sky. He swept the line of the escarpment with his eyes, then spurred after Dane.

"Hi! Dane, stop a minute and keep your hair on. You'll never get the police out in time, and I don't want them bickering with my drivers. Hi! Grainger! Newsome! where are you, you young devils? Newsome, ride like hell after the troop and bring them back here to me. Grainger, go back and meet the droves and make them come in on the other side of the court-house. Don't wait, Grainger, get on with it!"

Newsome was floundering down the sodden slope.

"It's too late, sir," said Grainger, "they're coming now —look!"

" Never mind, we'll turn the beggars."

He put his tired horse to the gallop, and, followed by Grainger, hurried to where a mass of panting, tossing heads showed the ponies coming into the open beyond the police lines.

The struggle was short. Dane, the police sentries, Cavell, Grainger and a couple of outriding drivers, made a desperate cordon. The shrill whinnying of the ponies and their quivering snorts broke through the shouts and scuffle of blows. Then came the break, one, two, three, five, seven—a long line streaming down to the still and gleaming slice of water.

Dane, foreseeing the break, had stepped aside. Grainger's pony joined the rout. Cavell stayed—struggled—vanished. The camels, their great splay feet slobbering all ways in the mud, followed the ponies. The animals smashed up the still surface of the water as if it had been a glass mirror. The night was full of splashing and gurgling. The swarm of animals, shoved from behind, jostled through the pool, reached the great bund—breached it. The water came slowly at first and then with a rush, sweeping away the trampled earthworks. The recalled troops rode upon the mob of beasts and beat them clumsily up and down, until the wreckage was complete beneath innumerable hoofs.

Grainger, jerking and kicking his pony, came up the slope to where Dane stood watching, shouting.

" Where's the Colonel? By God, Dane, I believe he went under! "

He rode on, without waiting for an answer. Dane saw him stop, dismount and stoop over a shadow. He held his breath with a short prayer that could hardly have been addressed to the Western God. But the shadow moved and stood up, leaning upon the other shadow.

" It's all right, Dane," called Grainger.

Dane did not answer. At the foot of the slope was a hoof-pitted mire, which glistened muddily in the moonlight, to show where the enclosure had been. He stared at it long enough to see that there was nothing to be done, then turned and went back to the bungalow.

XV

SHORTLY after the rains broke at Hargeisa three letters were written at almost the same time by men who, widely apart in place, were yet all playing their part in the same imperial event. Sir John Chard sat writing a letter to Major Dane. He wrote, as always, upon the four sides of a piece of stout white note-paper, in handwriting methodical and square. Through the window from below came the slur of wheels polishing Piccadilly, a steady accompaniment, except when a bus jarred through with a louder note.

" . . . I am always glad to hear from you, and am sorry you do not write more. Reading between the lines of your last I thought you seemed a bit down. . . . Things may be rather difficult for you just now. A transfer might not be impossible, if you want it.

" We are all very busy talking about the new Government. It brings Alverley to the Colonial Office again. He may find it too much for him as he's getting on, but he certainly will preside over the Commission upon Tropical Dependencies. Personally I respect him, but I cannot see that his appointment is much good to us, family connections considered. Cavell must be congratulating himself on having picked a winner. By the way, what of the wife? She comes of good stock, and I have some responsibility for sending her out."

He went on to speak of Sheringham and Blaker.

" I saw Sheringham when he came through . . . I am afraid he is very bitter, and hardly likely to settle down in West Africa. Make a point of letting me know about Blaker next mail. He has not written, and I am not quite happy about him. I cannot think what he's doing in Zeila. He can only be there for a short time as a stop-gap.

" I am loafing and hate it. It's hard to believe I have severed all connection with Somaliland. I must not talk politics, but you know the sort of thing I like to hear, and especially about the

great experiment. A great pity you had not launched it before I left. They have offered me one or two things tentatively and one definitely, which I have refused. This is between ourselves."

He looked up, the eyes dormant in the powerful head. It was two o'clock. In Somaliland, if the Governor were in Berbera, he was probably looking over papers with the Secretary, in hopes of the mail going out next day. Well, Page was having his way. Not much was left of the political edifice he had been so many years building or learning how to build. And no disaster had occurred. Perhaps none would. It was none of his business, anyhow. That was to accept the next offer that was made to him, whatever it was, instead of vegetating in England. With this resolution he closed and addressed his letter.

. . . . .

Chard's guess as to the Governor's occupation was nearly right. He was just dismissing Forster, with whom relations were cordial, on the basis of his complete domination. Then he remained at his desk to write a personal letter. It was to Cavell, and parts of it were interesting.

"I am glad that you are pleased with the last batch of camels. They looked a likely lot to me as they passed through. That about completes the outfit, I think.

"We have only just ceased discussing the dramatic incident of your trying to stop the stampede at the dam. Mrs. Colver is our chief informant, as always. I am glad to hear that such damage as you received is now a thing of the past. I am sorry that Dane's work was spoiled, but it was one of those things that cannot be helped. No, the administration had neither part nor lot in the experiment. It was purely his own show, but I am none the less sorry for the accident.

"I note what you say about the M.R. grazing reserves, but I do not think you need take the matter seriously. The Somal always has complained on that score, and we must assume that the D.C. considers it his business to register such complaints. Forster tells me this has been a matter of routine ever since the Rifles were established. Which reminds me that we have at last got the town here in some sort of order, and, in doing so, have considerably surprised some of the local magnates. A few of them still try to pay calls at Government House, but don't often get beyond the sentry now.

"I am very sorry to hear that Mrs. Cavell has not been so well lately. I don't know what to suggest, as she is in the highest and healthiest station in Somaliland, and now the rains have

come it should be very fresh and pleasant up there. Why not take local leave and go a short and easy trek? I wish I could, but a multiplicity of business keeps me here.

Kindest regards to Mrs. Cavell.

Yours sincerely,

LIONEL PAGE."

. . . . .

In Piccadilly at this hour there were crowds; in Berbera a small society; in Zeila there was loneliness such as only a population of natives and sea-birds can make for a white man. So thought Blaker, sitting upon his veranda and looking straight across half a mile of sandy flats to where the sea was beginning to come back towards the bungalow for nearly the three hundredth time since he had come there. He was unshaven and unkempt and his khaki drill tunic hung open, showing a naked breast. He stared in front of him, shifting his gaze now and then, but not seeing the different things in front of him—the half-dozen dhows being careened a mile up the shore, the thousand sea-birds upon the sand-banks, a dozen goats picking over the scum at high-water-mark.

On his knees was a sheaf of cracked papers. Here and there where one thrust out at an angle the first pencilled words could be seen. "Dear ——" or "Dear and beautiful one," and once "Rhona, darling woman." He looked through them smiling, and laid them in a pile on the floor beside him. Taking out some matches he lit the lowest sheet, and watched them twist and blacken in the grip of an almost invisible flame. Through the open doors of two rooms a couple of Somali boys watched him with an expression in their eyes that no African should have when he looks at his master.

Blaker spoke under his breath now and then.

"Well, good-bye," he said, when the last white sheet settled into purple flakes. "Just as well. And now what do I do next?"

He clasped his knee and still, unseeing, gazed over the level gold and the level blue. He was tired and a fretful twist came and went upon his lips. At the back the boys talked in an undertone, and in the town the natives chaffered and loafed, prayed and squatted in circles, talking, talking, talking. It was all as meaningless to the boy on the veranda as the scuffling and shouting of the sea-birds which came faintly across the sands. As meaningless, but not so unimportant. He had never hurt a sea-bird, and if he had, they were not revengeful; their talk was of precedence upon the sand-bank, of refuse from the dhows, of the whale stranded two miles up the shore.

"It's a funny old show, the British Empire," he concluded after a while. Then he sat silent for an hour, throwing first one leg, then another, over the arms of his chair.

The sky began to colour and a few clouds lay on the brim of the sea, waiting to couch the sun. From the mosque not far away came the hoarse voices of old men praying, and in the village a drum began to beat. He smiled at the last sound. How often had he read stories of such a drum, a sound of mystery and doom! Yet it made no ghastly echo in his heart. Strangely enough, he reflected, he was not that kind of a coward.

"Boy!" he called.

There was no answer. He got up stiffly and went to the back of the house. The yard and kitchen were empty.

"Boy!" he called again, unnecessarily loudly, and then, very quietly, "Boy!"

In the gap in the wall a man appeared. It was the faithful old police sergeant, Ali Warsoma, who had fought under Dane in East Africa and whom Dane had managed to get sent to Zeila. He said nothing, but remained standing beside the gateway. Good old Ali! Good old Dane! Blaker went back into the house and sat down at the huge P.W.D. desk. The old men were still praying hoarsely in the mosque. It seemed strange to be sitting and doing nothing. But, after all, what was there to do? Yes, there was something. He groped for some note-paper, and slowly, with many long pauses, during which he stared unseeing at the shore, he wrote a letter.

XVI

The weeks following the rains ran on at Hargeisa, and on the level and in depressions a scattering of grass greened the sand. Each aloe bore in the middle of its leathery body a budded spike that rose to a tall spar. Soon those naked buds would burst to show whether they held yellow or crimson petals, and the flower would peel out on the staff, bare as the flame of a candle. Once or twice a week clouds came, and the rain ; sometimes the river would come ravening in its way to the sea which it could never reach.

Rhona was not well. That was clear to Cavell from the morning after his return, when, having spent the night at the camp, he rode slowly over to the bungalow, lame and bandaged. It was clear, too, that this was not the *malaise* of a week or fortnight, to be cured by a tonic or a change of scene. It made a great difference to Cavell's life to have in his house a pale, devitalised Rhona, who answered him with only half a smile and half a laugh, and who submitted to his mastership without surrendering.

There were no scenes at the bungalow, no questions nor reproaches. Cavell had learned early the habit of restraint, and he had much faith in a waiting game. He removed control deliberately, chosing his moment. So now he was very patient. Either she had taken a dislike to the place or was brooding over some imagined injury of his, or it was one of those feminine whimsies for which, though there was no reason, there was remedy. Cavell had always been interested in women, and he regarded their handling as a very fine art. He had no fears of failing with his own wife. He often watched other men's blundering with contempt. He had marked some of the other men in his wife's company, and despised them for their nervousness and the maladroit manner in which they treated her. Dane seemed to him the most amateurish—eyes, movements, hands, voice, choice of subject, all was as wrong as it could be. Women

were as restless as high-spirited horses: the one fatal mistake was unsureness of touch. Yet these fools fumbled with them, while the women tricked them, laughed at them, ran away from them. A single straight glance or one gesture of assurance was sufficient to bring these delightful, dancing creatures to a standstill.

So he pretended to be unaware of any change in Rhona, meeting it quite naturally with a change in himself. Two could play at the game, but the one who outlasted was generally the man. He had his work to fill the day and his plans to charm the evening. She had nothing. Her life was her life with him, and she had all day in which to think of it. Either she would surrender or he would choose a moment when he knew his assault would be invincible. Half measures and treatyings were as bad as defeat. So he smiled to himself, feeling no anger against her, but only a half-amused exasperation which could be soothed by going back to his old measure of alcohol.

Rhona recognised his forbearance, was grateful and yet feared it. For the first time in her life she was unhappy. She took up her burden without grace. She was young, but life was finished for her. It had petted and spoiled her, and then thrust her out to injustice and cruelty. Towards Cavell her feelings were dead. She had been moved by the drought, and Dane's schemes had brought a fragrance into that hard country. She had put great hopes into the new garden: her husband had returned to ruin it. That he had arrived by chance and injured himself in his efforts to save it did not seem to count. All she could think when he told her was, "Poor Dane! Poor Dane!" She bandaged his injured foot and attended his shoulder without a pulse of sympathy. She heard his anger at the loss of Hais with satisfaction. She was amazed at her own coldness and her courage in showing it.

She did not see Dane. She waited for a chance to tell him what she felt about his disaster, and when it came and they met face to face on the way to the polo ground he saluted, turned his head, and rode on. Then she saw that she had no ties but one. She was Cavell's wife and nobody's friend. When this deadness passed she supposed she and her husband would go on as other married people did. She could not tell how that would be, and she had no one in whom to confide. She must wait and see how time settled these matters. Jack should never have left her alone. In that short period she had broken her resolution, meddled with this ungrateful country, and offered help and friendship where it was not wanted.

It would have needed a strong woman to stand out against Cavell. Rhona was very young, and she was very much alone. The strain wore her down. Sometimes, when he came in to her in the evening, she would lift her face, almost from habit, for his kiss, and he would pass on without noticing. At dinner they would talk, and he would smile at her with a smile that had no warmth of intimacy. Sometimes she tried to provoke his anger, longing for the inevitable storm to break. She noticed his heavy drinking and told herself that she was only an alternative to his glass. Surely that was unforgivable, yet she would have to forgive it.

She would have broken down sooner had it not been for Rankin. He came often and uninvited, hanging about the house, quite untroubled by the comings and goings of the Colonel. He lent her books and discussed them with her.

One afternoon she went shooting with him. As they rode home a mood of black depression came over her. She interrupted his talk about the country.

"Oh! I hate the country. It's your fault that I ever began to worry about it. It was you who deliberately forced me to see it. You made me hear all Major Dane's foolish plans. What good have any of us done or ever will do?"

"You see, Mrs. Cavell," said Rankin, "you have to be interested in something. I showed you a very thrilling drama—or is it a tragedy?"

"What do you mean?"

"Major Dane's little fight with Africa. It's bound to end one way of course, but while it lasts it will be interesting."

"Major Dane," said Rhona rashly, "is a fanatic. He is as hard and unkind as this country. I know I shouldn't speak of it, and I know I was not very much use, but I did try to help him, and I was heartbroken about his dam. Yet now he's taken it into his head to cut me. Oh! I'm finished with this country, and finished with trying to be human to all you queer men."

"Dane is not so queer as you think."

"He's unnatural. He's extreme in everything he does. I can't respect him. He slaves for the natives and ruins himself over his gardens, but he's no more humanity than——"

"Oh yes, he has. He knows how to love."

"Love!" repeated Rhona, her thoughts in quest of a woman. "He's not married, is he?"

"I suppose you'd call it a friendship."

"Oh, I know he likes you."

"Me! He knows me little and cares less. I amuse him.

He forgives me because I am Irish. No, I said he loved someone."

"Who?"

"Blaker, of course. I hardly know the man, but Dane is like a she-cat with one kitten about Blaker. Thinks about him, worries about him, fires up when you mention him on the off-chance that you're going to run him down."

"Oh!" said Rhona. "I did not know that. Of course, I knew they were friends, but you mean something very exceptional."

"Very."

As they rode down towards the nullah they saw Dane crossing their path at right angles.

"Hi!" cried Rankin. "Come and join us a minute." But Dane rode on, without slackening pace, calling over his shoulder something about "Sorry" and "Busy."

When Rhona got home she went straight in, bathed and began to change. It was guest-night at the Mess, and as a great privilege she was to dine there. She brushed her hair in the lamplight. She gazed earnestly at the white face and shadow-smudged eyes, staring from the mirror. "Poor Rhona! Poor Rhona!" she said, and then, "Oh, how I hate people who cry!"

She thought. "Everyone here dislikes me. Jack will dislike me soon. I feel so ill: I must have someone to be kind to me. What do I care about Somalis and policy, irrigation and ungrateful officials? They are all the shadows of life. In two years I shall have forgotten all about them. But Jack will always be there. I might as well be at peace with him as at war. We're married and we shall go on being married. After all, I chose him. He was the best I knew. He was so beautifully kind to me once; he made me feel as if I were something quite wonderful, purer and lovelier than any girl had ever been. I must have him kind to me again. I must have an arm round me and a nice rough hand in my hair. What has Africa to do with that? I may be contemptible, but that is how I am made."

She heard Cavell come in and mix himself a drink. "I will make myself pitiful and he will have to be kind to me," she thought. She crouched on her bed, hugging her knees, her head bent, and her hair arranged in attractive confusion. He was a long time coming. She counted the drinks he mixed—two—three—four—how she hated that! If he had ever become gross like Durell or the Doctor, she could not have forgiven him, but grossness and Cavell would always be strangers.

He came in now. He must have noticed her attitude at once, but he did not show it.

"Dinner at the Mess to-night," he said on his way to his dressing-room.

"I don't think I am coming," she said. This was strange, so was her voice. He must have noticed. She peered through her hair. He was lighting a cigarette over the lamp and his face looked tired in the glow. Her attitude had only been half acting. Now she sat up with a jerk, slinging the hair back from her face, and said:

"Jack, how long is this to go on?"

He finished lighting up, came slowly across to the end of the bed, leaned over, arms crossed on the rail and examined her in silence.

"Oh, don't be like that!" she begged. "It's so unnecessary. I know you can be hard. I know you can be cruel and lecture me and make me feel a worm. Let's cut all that out and get to what happens at the end—you know, where you kiss me and we're happy ever after. At least," she added, as he did not move, "if it's not going to end like that, I may as well go home."

The moment had come, but things were not going as he had planned. There was a tone in Rhona's voice that he could not understand. Certainly she looked very disarming, crumpled in a heap on the bed, dressed in her silk petticoat, and her loose hair. But she probably knew that, the minx! and he must not be weak and spoil everything at the critical moment.

"You know you'll have to be a great deal more explicit before I shall understand you," he said, smiling.

"Beast!" muttered Rhona, her eyes filling with tears of shame and anger. With a quick twist of her body she fell back, face downwards, upon the bed.

Cavell forgot all his plans. Pitching away his cigarette, he knelt, leaning across the rigid little body.

"Rhona, Rhona, I'm sorry, darling."

She whipped round, her face rosy and her eyes shining.

"Did I hear you say 'I'm sorry.' Did you say 'I'm sorry, darling'?" He nodded, and she pushed herself close under him. "Oh, my dear, how good you are! Thank you—thank you—Jack. It makes so much difference. My darling man, there's a little mistiness in your eyes, really and truly there is." She kissed his eyes. "I love them so. Were you sorry for me then? Have you been unhappy, too?"

Again he nodded, and she put her arms around his neck, and

he, not knowing whether he were defeated or victorious, glad or disappointed, submitted to her delicate caressing. She talked eagerly.

"We won't quarrel about who was right and who was wrong. Let's pretend it was all my fault. We'll just go on from this moment. Oh, Jack, you've made me so happy! Don't you see why, you blind old bat! It's so easy. I wonder you never tried it before, Jack. I know!"

"What, darling?"

"We'll go a little trek—a second honeymoon. And you shall do my hair every night. Do you remember?"

"Yes, sweetheart." He kissed her, not knowing what to say. She knelt upon the bed beside him, joyful and talking eagerly. She made love to him. How had it happened? The interview had not gone according to plan. Rhona, like this, was new and sweet, yet he was uneasy, sitting passive and wondering.

"Dear, to have you gentle like this," she was saying. "How silly I have been to let you frighten me! Have I found the real 'you' at last—something behind your ambition and your soldier ways and your good looks? You're absurdly good-looking, Jack. I wish you could see yourself now." She traced his features with her finger. "Such a clean-cut nose and such aristocratic nostrils, and a sort of completeness and haughtiness about it all, as if you had no doubt you were the finest thing in your line that God ever made. I'm not going to take a bit of notice of it. Oh, Jack, let me love you!

"Ss-sh, you silly little girl." He crushed her breast against his. "What nonsense you're talking. Get dressed or we shall be late for dinner."

She sprang up and finished dressing singing, dancing about the room like the girl she was. "Oh, what queer creatures women are!" she thought as, looking in the glass, she saw the changed face—eyes wide and bright, happy mouth and coloured cheeks. Afterwards, looking back to that night, she wondered what Cavell had thought as he watched her. Had he known one moment of doubt of himself? Had he wondered if there were things in women that he did not know? Had any vision of a new and more beautiful future forced itself, however mistily, into his mind?

At dinner, Rhona was gay and witty; sitting between Cheetham and Durell she sparkled as a shaken jewel must sparkle, irrespective of whether it is appreciated or not. She laughed at the rather forced humour of the subalterns, teased

Durell and flirted airily with Cheetham. She had half an eye upon her husband at the other end of the table, trying to hold his glance a second along the corridor of faces. Not even Dane was allowed to ignore her. In her present mood she could not take Dane or his trouble seriously. His grave face only roused her malice. Each time he turned away to listen to Rankin arguing with Jackson, she dragged him back into the conversation.

"But, Major Dane, I insist upon an answer." "No, you can't evade the issue like that, Major Dane." "Now, you see I've offended him. Mr. Cheetham, won't you make the peace between us?"

Soon the whole table was drawn into her orbit, and the men listened, smiling and puzzled.

After dinner they played bridge in the mess-tent, and later, when Dane's early departure broke up one of the tables, they went on to poker. Rhona did not play; she sat beside her husband, watching every move. Rankin played superbly; Cavell and Durell were very cool; the subalterns were a class below them. They sat round the rough table in their service uniforms, crouched forward, or leaning back in their chairs, intent and often in silence. Two lamps threw an unsteady light upon the canvas walls. Through the looped doorway other tents could be seen faintly, each in its maze of pegged ropes. A sentry stood by the gap in the zariba. From beyond, where the bush tattered the sky, came the unheeded howling of the hyænas. Rhona, losing interest in the play, reviewed the players. Here were nine white men, masters of this huge frontier district. How lightly they held their work, always fooling or grumbling, earnest only about shooting trips, a discussion upon polo, a game of cards. Was the courage and earnestness really there, deeply hidden? What qualities had brought each of them to this strange place? Would the moment of danger bring out these qualities, and would they suddenly seem noble to her instead of commonplace? That her husband had high thoughts and plans that reached far she knew. Surely, surely, they were good plans. They must be good, because she loved him.

There was a stir and a break of talk amongst the men. Grainger, who was Orderly Officer, walked out. Cavell turned to her.

"Tired, darling? Like to go?"

She smiled, and shook her head, whispering:

"I'm quite happy. I'll stay as long as you like."

Grainger, a tall young man, blocked the opening again.

"Here's Major Dane, sir. He wants to talk to you."

"Well! Can't he come in?"

"I think he wants to speak to you outside a moment. It's a message, I believe."

Cavell went out. Absent-mindedly Rhona looked through the doorway to where the two stood talking in the space amongst the tents.

"Hullo, where's the Colonel? Is he coming back, Mrs. Cavell?" asked Cheetham.

"I suppose so. He's just talking to Major Dane out there."

"Something up, I wonder!" murmured Rankin.

There was silence a moment as they sat back waiting, the cards already dealt, lying in little shining heaps in front of them.

"He won't be long."

"No, we'd better wait."

"What is it, Grainger?"

"How should I know? One of the Rifles' hyænas has bagged his meat perhaps, and he's lodging a complaint." He slouched off through the opposite doorway.

Rhona looked out. The two were still talking, but they kept their voices low, and she could learn nothing from their movements in the dim light. The lamplight from the tent just lit Dane's back, and Rhona noticed that every now and then he jerked his head to look at Cavell, who was the taller of the two. But that was a characteristic gesture.

At last Cavell came back, slowly, as if thinking. They all looked up, but he was quite non-committal. He looked round amongst the men, selecting.

"Cheetham, I wonder if you'd just escort my wife back over the river-bed. I have to stay on a little while."

"Certainly, sir."

"If you don't mind, dear," he turned to Rhona; "there's no point keeping you here. I shan't be long."

"Oh! very well." She stood up, a little surprised.

"Not playing any more, sir?" asked Rankin, his hand poised over the cards. Catching Cavell's glance he shuffled them up together and put them away.

Rhona put on her cloak, said "Good night!" without much ceremony to the group and stooped through the opening.

"Jack!" she called him through after her, turned and whispered, "What is it? Has anything happened?"

"No, it's perfectly all right," he said, thinking she was nervous. "I'll be over soon. It's only a message."

" Just coming, Mrs. Cavell," cried Cheetham, who had gone to his tent for a lamp.

Rhona walked on slowly. At the gap in the zariba, Dane was standing aside to let her pass. He stepped straight into the yellow aisle that led through the darkness from the tent door. She saw his face.

" Oh, Major Dane, something's happened ! What is it ? "

" Didn't he tell you ? "

" Where are you, Mrs. Cavell ? I'm just coming," called Cheetham cheerfully.

" All right. You go on and light the path." She caught Dane's arm as he turned to go. " Quick ! quick ! Tell me."

" It's Blaker. They've murdered him."

He went back quietly to the tent, leaving her with Cheetham,

XVII

AN hour after the wireless message was received from the head clerk at Zeila, the Governor was sitting over a large scale map of Somaliland. The crisis had come, and he did not mean to bungle matters. The boy's death was shocking, and the hateful duty of writing to his parents lay heavily upon him. But death, where there is no more than an official bond, is final. Useless to waste sympathy upon a dead body, with the question of to-morrow's action still unanswered. The young D.P.O. who, alive, was a rather disgruntled young cub, was now a name which would have honourable but tragic associations. Nor would he be unavenged.

Eagerly the Governor calculated the map. He ran his finger along the coast. Here was Las Khorai, remote, and the home of tribes out of touch with those in the west. Las Khorai could be dismissed. Here was Berbera, remote enough from Zeila to be outside military calculations. Right behind it lay Burao. Burao must take its chance unless Cavell decided to send one company there. Hargeisa! Thank Heaven they could count upon Hargeisa keeping quiet! If Cavell wanted two companies for his punitive expedition, he could keep the third one either at Hargeisa or Burao, but he personally would be inclined to leave Hargeisa with Dane and the police. In any case, Cavell would not be away long. And Dane was a host in himself at such moments.

In his heart he had always hoped the day would come when he could send across for more troops from Aden and a vanguard of a couple of aeroplanes. If there was trouble at Zeila it would be serious trouble. The Aysa had never been tamed. The C.O. would understand the general position in the country after his reports, and the Colonial Secretary would agree that it was cheaper in the long run to settle the thing once for all. He sat in the same chair in which Chard had sat in their last interview, foreseeing what would happen. He imagined Cavell's

dispatch from Zeila. He had done well of course. He had no doubt of Cavell. He saw the transport in the little harbour outside, dwarfing the jetty, the reinforcements camped up beyond the mosque, a mountain battery parked in the square. He saw the Somals brought to heel at last, complete disarmament carried through before the expeditionary force had re-embarked, and then—law and order spreading out from Berbera southward to the frontier of Abyssinia, east to Las Khorai and west to Zeila. No more hectoring from turbulent chiefs. No more semi-independent tribes along the borders. No relics of the Chard traditions of protectorate government.

He looked at the map again. Rapidly he cut it up with his eye into new districts, saw roads running through the bush, perhaps a railway inland from Berbera, crossing the Abyssinian frontier. Berbera, in any case, three times the size, a port of call for small steamships, the resources of the land investigated and exploited, the tribes paying taxes. Then he pushed the map away, sent for Forster, and set to work upon the necessary dispatches. There were messages to be sent to Hargeisa, a careful letter by special runner to Cavell. A dhow, containing some police, and a machine gun must be sent immediately up the coast to attempt the rescue of the clerks, whose message represented them as hemmed in at the wireless station, faced by an insurgent native town. If possible, the body must be retrieved and buried.

Dane's orderly handed the Governor's letter to Cavell a few days later, just as he was riding off the parade ground before breakfast. There had been a full parade. First the camels had passed in groups, and, wheeling round, had returned at the trot in column of troops. Then the companies swung into line at the end of the parade ground, and Cavell had ridden slowly past them ; not a detail of equipment, not a button nor a strap seemed to escape his eyes, shining out of his set face. But in his heart he was glorying in the efficiency of his men and the splendid condition of the animals.

" Well ? " asked the Major, as they reached the parting of the ways.

" Pretty good," said Cavell. " Ripe for work, eh, Durrell ? "

" When are they going to get it ? "

" Tell you after breakfast. Just got a letter from H.E. This couldn't have come at a better time for us. The M.R.'s on the top of its form."

Durell looked at his chief, who was gazing towards the far end of the parade ground, where the last file of camels was

bobbing off to the lines. A sentence formed itself in Durell's mind ; he opened his mouth to utter it, and at the last moment substituted another.

" Well, take me along with you ? That's all I ask."

" Oh, you'll come along all right. If I have my way these lines will be pretty empty in a few days."

He galloped all the way back. A sense of physical fitness burned in him like fire. As he sat in his saddle he called each hard muscle into play, testing and exulting. He waved and shouted to Dane at breakfast on his veranda, as he went swinging past the bungalow. Joy and confidence filled him. The work he had done was good ; the work he was going to do no more than an easy and fascinating sport to him, while beyond lay the rewards, a seal on his success and wider opportunity.

He left Rhona at breakfast while he sat down alone to read his letter. He smiled as he read. How well his seed had grown ! But the ground had been ready. The Governor's ideas and plans were his own, a set made up of innumerable fragments scattered in conversations, letters and reports. A company for Burao. Nonsense ! Page was a fool not to see that a company at Hargeisa dominated Burao as well. The only question was whether it was necessary to dominate Burao at all. It was only three days' march from Berbera, and to Berbera reinforcements could come across in forty-eight hours. He was quite prepared to take all three companies to Zeila. Better not. If anything happened to the D.C. at Burao, he would be censured.

He took a sketch map of the country out of his pocket and gazed at it. There would be extensive trouble in the Zeila district, of course. The tribes there would be sure to put up a good show. He rather suspected Las Khorai, too, in spite of Page's assurance. Las Khorai, lying in an eccentric position, like Zeila, just doubly remote when troops were concentrated at this last station, was the ideal spot for insurrection. But that was not his affair. Trouble at Las Khorai would only confirm his constant warnings and demands.

He would leave Hargeisa with a light heart, and Rhona in it. There would be a company there. If for any reason it was decided later to move the company to Burao, she could go with it, and possibly on to Berbera with a small escort. But Hargeisa had seen a good deal of artillery and machine-gun practice lately, and he would quite happily have left Rhona there with only the police. They were the best police in Somaliland, and Dane was the best man to leave with them. In a crisis, Dane forgot his theories about natives and his dreams about irrigation

and fell back upon the habits of the service that he had been a fool to leave. If Derea Waraba started his games along the frontier, the Gadabursi and the Habr Awwal would deal with him as before. He could inflict a good deal of damage without ever coming nearer Hargeisa, and, incidentally, he would keep the Gadabursi busy. Afterwards, when Somaliland was in order, they could settle with him.

"Oh, Jack, do come! Everything will be cold."

Rhona! He frowned. Of course, Blaker's death had been a terrible shock to her, and he had been very ready to sympathise. He had hurried back that night the message came to break it to her carefully, and to soothe her with love and sympathy. He had found her white and silent. She asked no questions. She showed no desire to discuss it. She had taken no interest in all the business of preparation into which he had flung himself. She had said and done nothing he could remark, but he knew that she had shut herself up in her thoughts, and that, for some reason he could not understand, their reconciliation had been no more than a dream.

This time he was angry. Approaching a great moment of his life, he had beside him a woman who would not, or could not, rise to it. What right had she to brood alone about young Blaker? He was her husband, about to go into action, and, for all she knew, into danger or death. He was too busy to study her moods now. It was time the girl learned the lesson of loyalty, or felt the touch of the spur.

"Rhona," he said, sitting down at the table, "I have heard from the Governor, and got my marching orders. I'm going direct from here to Zeila, just as soon as we can get off—to-morrow or the day after. I shan't be home to lunch to-day. I am taking 'A' and 'B' companies, and I am leaving 'C' company here, and you are as well here as anywhere. If you feel in the slightest degree nervous you can go on to Berbera with Jackson and a few police. But I should like Jackson to come with us to Zeila. And I assure you that you will be perfectly safe here."

"Of course. It never entered my head to be nervous."

"That's all right. You can rely on Dane for anything you need. He will arrange about a guard, escorts and so on. Don't hesitate to make use of him. Remember it's the man's job to look after you."

"And who will be left with 'C' company?"

"Rankin and Cheetham. You may find Rankin rather eccentric in ordinary life, but he's an excellent man at his work."

"I don't doubt it."

"I daresay Cheetham or Dane would pitch a tent somewhere near the bungalow and sleep there at night, if you would like it."

"Please don't bother them. I'm not at all frightened. I'm sure you wouldn't leave me here if there were any danger."

He looked up, but this was stated as fact, not as an endearment. He returned to his breakfast.

"There's one thing I want to ask you, Jack. If you find anything belonging to Blaker, papers, diaries, any personal treasures, you will keep them for his people, won't you? His mother will feel so far away from what has happened; she will have to live upon memory and imagination and pride. She will feel proud of him."

Cavell grunted. He told himself he had no right to feel exasperated, but he certainly did.

"Tell me, Jack, exactly what do you intend to do at Zeila?" This was a sign of grace. He thought over his reply. "There won't be any real fighting, of course," she went on.

"Why 'Of course'?" he asked, nettled again.

"I was talking to Jackson, and he gave me that impression."

"Oh, did he? Jackson happens to be a policeman." He had no illusions about the romance or danger of the expedition, but his experience of women told him that Rhona ought still to have them.

"Well, you have machine guns, and military discipline, and bombs, and——"

"And they have unlimited numbers, and, thanks to an imbecile policy in the past, unlimited rifles. I've noticed, Rhona, how curious your attitude towards this expedition has been. Do you feel a distaste for your husband's job?"

"I don't much like the idea of your fighting natives."

"Oh! You'd rather we were destroying white men! Or is it that we are not endangering ourselves enough for your sense of melodrama?"

"What a foolish way to speak!" she said, reddening. "You know quite well what I feel. But I'm not going to quarrel with you, when you are just going. I only want to ask you to think of me once or twice when a question of life and death depends upon you for its answer. Especially when its a case of women and children suffering. You see, Jack, these people—they are just children."

"They did for your friend Blaker."

"Oh, I don't blame them."

There was an unmistakable emphasis upon the last word.

"Well I . . ." This final exasperation brought him to

his feet with a smothered profanity. He called for his pony, and rode quickly back to the camp.

Rhona watched the pony, ploughing through the deep sand of the nullah, kept in a gallop by the spur, then she took a piece of paper out of her pocket. It was a pencilled note in Rankin's hand, written the morning after the dinner at the Mess. It began without date or preface.

"Re your note about Dane. I went across to him late last night, when all the pow-wow was over, but he kicked me out. I saw him this morning, and said something about you—how much you would feel it, etc., etc. I should advise you to leave him alone. I'm sure you will want me to be frank, and will acquit me of malice when I tell you why—I think he believes that you and your husband between you were responsible for sending Blaker to Zeila."

This last was not a very pleasant sentence to have had running in your head for days and nights. She must speak to someone who understood, if only a little, what she felt. At the risk of any humiliation she must see Captain Rankin. He was strange and sometimes brutal, but he had intuition; and anything was better than calling to her husband across the unmeasured distance that had divided them these last few days. And only through Rankin could she approach Major Dane and vindicate herself to him. That was not her only object; she wanted to be in the presence of someone who had loved Blaker, and who, alone among these hard-headed men, was sharing with her in offering a tribute of grief to the dead.

She went in and wrote again to Rankin, begging him to come across and see her. She called Hassan.

"The Captain Sahib, and very quickly, Hassan."

She sat waiting for the first two hours of the morning. Soon the boys ceased chattering at the back of the house and settled down to sleep. There was nothing to look at. Now and then a lizard ran across the wall behind. Once or twice, distant figures crossed the nullah, a boy with some dun cattle, a file of burdened camels, strung head to tail, and goaded by a shrill woman. At last! Here was a horseman, loping through the trees on the near side of the river-bed. She went back to rouse a boy and ordered some refreshment. When she came on to the veranda, a man was just coming up the path, but it was not Rankin.

"Major Dane!" she exclaimed.

"Good morning, Mrs. Cavell." He stepped on to the veranda, took her hand, gave her a long, straight look, and

after crushing her knuckle bones together with a sudden grip, released her. There was not a trace of his usual shyness about him. "I want to talk to you. Let's go in there." They went into the sitting-room, and he drew his chair straight in front of hers.

"I suppose Captain Rankin prevailed upon you to come," she suggested.

"Rankin? No. Why? I haven't seen him." He paused. "I want to talk to you about something very important."

"About Blaker?" He nodded. In spite of all that seemed to divide them, Rhona felt again that sense of ease with him which had surprised her before. There seemed to be no need of the excuses, explanations, and embarrassments she had anticipated. "Will you let me say something first? That I loved Blaker—loved him as if he had been my younger brother. And I know, or I guess, what you two meant to each other. There isn't any consolation, is there? Except that it is honourable, I suppose, to die in a service like this."

Dane's glance fell; he stared down as if tracing the pattern of the rug.

"I should say, on the whole, that to die for the Empire is an honourable way of going out. Unfortunately, Blaker did not die that way."

"What do you mean?"

"I am going to explain. Blaker has put a great responsibility upon you and me, and we've got to grapple with it together. A special runner came to-day, and, amongst others, are two letters from him, one for me and one for you. They were written and dispatched just before he was killed. He tells me that in yours, in addition to a letter, is an official report of all the circumstances. That document is as much mine as yours, and as we are his only two friends in the country, we are to decide together whether we shall make any use of it."

"Make any use of it? Are you suggesting that there may have been something . . . something discreditable about his death?"

"I know that there was."

"Oh, poor Blaker! Poor Blaker! He never should have been sent there. He was only a boy, and, whatever he did, he can't be blamed. And we are his friends. Thank Heaven it need never come out! Do you know, I think I would rather not know it, myself. What good can it do now?"

"Mrs. Cavell, that's impossible. You must read what he's

written. It isn't as though only you and Blaker were concerned. We must see justice done."

"You mean upon the assassins? Far better that they should escape!"

"And innocent people suffer!"

"Oh, I see, the expedition . . ."

He felt in his pocket for the letter. It was bulky, but clean. The envelope contained only her name in faint purple pencilling.

"I'll leave you while you read it," he said, and went out on to the veranda.

Reverently, but sick with dread of what it would tell her, she opened the envelope. A thick, folded wad fell out; a smaller letter stayed inside. She opened this first.

"Zeila.

"RHONA, DEAREST WOMAN,

"(Please don't be angry with that. That is how I always think of you, and I know you too well to think that, in such a letter, you will imagine it impertinence.)

"I'm writing this letter to you because something may happen to me at any time, and I have a feeling it won't be very long now. I may say that I have already written four letters to you this week and torn them up. They seemed so formal and priggish. You wouldn't believe how difficult it is not to be priggish in a letter of this kind. Now I am just going to write whatever comes into my head.

"Well, to begin at the beginning, after leaving you on the track outside Hargeisa, I came on here, determined to make good. I think I did pretty well for a bit. I was frightfully severe with myself about the drink, and quite unnecessarily, for now I am imbibing my five tots a night like a perfect little gentleman. Yes, and to please you, I got up early and sweated around on a pony every day before breakfast. And I read books and made a list of my dirty clothes every Monday morning, when I sent them to the *dhobi*. He wanted them on Sunday, but I had always been brought up to Monday as washing-day. (Those were the days when I got an electro-plated jam-jar for winning the obstacle race, and then went and got religious mania.) But its queer about the drink, for when I was at Las Khorai, I never went to bed for a fortnight, as far as I can remember.

"But they didn't relieve me when I had expected, and you didn't write, and I had the funny forgotten feeling that comes in these places.

" Zeila is a funny place—never was any good at describing landscapes. It would make an excellent sea-side resort, what they call, I believe, a children's paradise—miles of sands and continuous sunshine. Indeed, the shore, in a fit of absence of mind, forgets to come to a natural conclusion, and goes running on inland without a break, for fifty miles or so.

" And you didn't write. I told you not to and you took that seriously. I told you I loved you and you didn't take that seriously. Perhaps you were right. Anyhow, you were the only person I have ever loved, and if it was calf-love, well—that's the best a calf has to offer, poor brute ! I can't reason it out. Contrary to the experience of the hermits, I find it impossible to think consecutively when I am alone. Anyhow, I soon lost the right to love you, and have not now the right even to talk to you about it. Not many men in this country would have. If you hate and despise me to an unbearable degree, ask Dane if it isn't hard, and if that text, ' He will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able,' is not a lie ? But then—it's no good asking Dane. He doesn't know.

" I went on writing to you. Oh, I don't believe I've mentioned that, have I ? Well, I have written to you ; covered reams of paper, all of which I burned to-day. Forgive me for those letters, even though you will never read them.

" Now I must tell you why I am writing in this curious way. There was a dispute in court about a betrothal. I need not tell you the details. They were a striking couple : the woman, Khedichu, was the most beautiful Somal I have ever seen. She stood as straight as a spear and had regular features, a European profile. The man, Ibrahim, was a well-known warrior of an important house, a scarred, impassive person in a spotless tobe. I couldn't decide the point, and sent them to the kathi. That night, when I was sitting upon the veranda, Khedichu suddenly appeared, as if out of the ground, and came up to me, walking beautifully. She implored me to do this and not to do that. I gathered that she had very secret reasons for not wanting to marry Ibrahim, but she dared not say so because Ibrahim, having a great reputation to keep up, would kill her—and someone else. She would do anything in the world for me, if only I would help her. Rhona, I am not pretending this was the first time, but, you see, Khedichu was a very important person. We talked late. You can finish the story for yourself—Ibrahim's secret, threatening message to me, my realisation of the futility of trying to arrest him. Have I mentioned that Ibrahim was a famous warrior ? I have no doubt that he will keep his word.

Whatever happens, for the sake of you and Chard and Dane, I must not let this scandal come out. So the odds are all against me; I am a sitting bird for Ibrahim and his friends.

"One is liable to be very selfish under such circumstances, and not to look very far beyond one's own disappearance. It was only this evening that I realised what my mysterious death may mean to the Governor, who will jump at any chance to bring on a show. You can imagine that was not a very pleasant thought. I've made a pretty average mess of my career here, and it seems rather a low-down way of going out, to leave these people here to pay a bill they don't owe. My own judgment is all at sea, so I have decided to do this. I leave the issue with you and Dane. You are calm and sane at Hargeisa. Dane will think of the interests of the country; you will think of me and my people. Where your husband comes in, I hardly like to think.

"Rhona, I meant to have been so businesslike and to cut out all sentiment. But I can't. It's worse than death to me to tell you this about myself, letting you see what a beast I am, when I might have finished in silence and left a not unhappy memory of me in your heart. I have been gnawing over this question for two days. I have asked myself what I owe this people and this country that I should do this for them. I never got anything out of them except loneliness, disgrace and death. I don't pity these people; to me they are like animals, and it seems no more unjust to knock a few more or less of them on the head than to slaughter heifers. Had it not been for Dane and Chard—and especially Dane—I should probably have been on the other side, and then I shouldn't be here at all.

"And yet—it's funny—last night as I sat here and saw the sun set beyond the sea, and colours that I could not name to you, or count, come down and stretch over the utter flatness from the horizon to the sea, and all the way inland to the mountains for sixty miles, I felt a sudden unhappiness because I was leaving. Not that I was leaving England and my home and people, nor you and my friends, but just because I was leaving this country, which I thought I hated—which I do hate.

"Anyhow, here's the letter, and here are the facts. Do what you think best with them. Burn this letter when you've read it. It's a pitiful effort. I'm going to write out a bare summary that you can use, and the chief clerk shall put his signature upon it in witness that it is mine, though he will not read it.

"I have written to my people, and half prepared them for

trouble. When you go home try and see my mother, and do what you can to throw dust in her eyes. You won't find it very difficult. She will love you, of course.

BLAKER."

Rhona read the letter straight through. Blaker had always been a boy to her. What business had tragedy to him? As she read on, pity almost deserted her. How could he? How could he? He had seemed so clean and young, and he said he loved her. Her cheeks flushed, burned, throbbed. She put her hands over them. She felt almost as if she stood with him before this Ibrahim, and endured the just scorn of an African. Then the sunset and the end of the letter—an unfinished story. She wanted to know more; she must know more. When did they kill him, and how? Her mind made faint pictures. Was it *thus* as he rode by the harbour, or *thus* as he sat on the veranda? A rifle or a spear? Did he fight? Was it quick? God grant that it was quick! Oh, the pitifulness of it! that young happy life, spoiled and wasted, that might have thriven in a gentler land, but was too weak to survive the cruelty of Africa.

Here was Dane coming back. The story of shame lay between them and she had to speak of it.

"Well, you've finished it?" Dane sat down near her as before. She looked at him; allowed him to read her in spite of the tears in her eyes and her flushed cheeks. It was not difficult but easy. Slowly, looking at him, she was made to feel the unimportance of her own emotion. "Are you going to let me read the letter?"

She handed it to him without hesitation, with all its intimacies and talk of love and sin. When he had finished he thought about it for several moments, and at last handed it back, looking at her carefully, as if weighing up her attitude. The feeling she showed by her tears could be read in his compressed lips.

"We must not be hard upon Blaker. He has done a very big thing in telling you of this. I think you are being hard, aren't you?" She nodded. "I don't see how a woman can really judge these things. Try and imagine what it means to a man—a boy like Blaker, to go to a place where there are none of his kind, no standards, no white women, no one to notice if he is shaved in the morning or cleaned up for dinner at night. He lets things go, one after the other, all the little things that mean so much. I know. I've been through it. Blaker's wrong when he says I can't understand." Rhona, looking

straight into his eyes, continued to believe what Blaker had implied. "Blaker was so terribly young. He'd never been properly broken in, and he could not bear to feel that there was hostility against him."

"You mean the Governor?"

"Yes, and your husband."

"There's one thing I cannot understand. He saw this was coming. Could he do nothing to prevent it?"

"He didn't want a scandal. If he had managed to settle Ibrahim without bringing on a big row, he couldn't sieze all Ibrahim's friends and relations, who would have taken up the feud. And now, what are we going to do about it?"

Rhona was silent; she began to see how this responsibility might affect her.

"I have always tried to keep clear of politics here; I have shut my eyes and ears. It seems I can do that no longer."

"It was foolish to try. It will hurt you all the more now. It generally falls to me to hurt you. I am your husband's opponent; I distrust his policy, and now I am going to tell you why."

"I think I know," said Rhona slowly. "Of course, I could not entirely shut my eyes and—I am good at guessing. I began to think at the time of the drought. As for this expedition, it's pretty clear that he exults in it, and you hate it. So you can spare yourself the unpleasant duty of explaining."

"It would not be an unpleasant duty. You may as well understand that from the start. My feelings about your husband and his policy are such that I have no scruples in fighting against him, even by attacking the loyalty of his wife, which I knew I could do. That is why I have avoided you since my enclosure was destroyed. I supposed you had some sympathy to offer me, but it would have been absurd to accept it, feeling as I did about your husband."

"I see." Rhona looked down, shivering a little. She had long studied her husband's enmity; for the first time she saw a little of what was ranged against it. Very carefully, Dane began to explain his point of view.

He had no doubt whatever that every use must be made of Blaker's information. There was no hope of the revelation preventing the expedition, but it should govern its action at Zeila. The Governor and Cavell wanted a free hand, both in employing the troops and in composing reports. Blaker's

letter would deprive them of that. Having read it, there could be no justification for general punitive action, or for the big insurrection which might result from such action.

"No justification! But surely, Major Dane, you can't go so far as to suggest——"

"Oh, I don't suggest; I know," said Dane, swinging round his head with a look meant for Cavell, not for her. But it died away at once. "You need do nothing but give me your permission to use this evidence. He need never even know that you had a letter. Hand the report over to me; it might just as well have come to me with my letter. Of course, you must not figure in an issue like this. Leave it all to me."

"That's impossible. Do you think I could or would hide it from him? He is bound to know. I tell you I daren't do it. Call me a coward if you like. You don't know him; he is terrible when anything like this comes up. If I interfered in this—why, I believe he would kill me. It would mean the end of everything between us. Oh, its easy enough for you to stand there and give advice! You've nothing to think about but your policy, and what you believe the interest of your country. But I—don't you understand?—he's my husband. What do politics and natives and expeditions and your hatred matter to me? Am I to sacrifice my life, my whole happiness for them? And supposing you are wrong with your scruples and ideals, and your traditions of Chard, whom I don't even know. Why shouldn't you be wrong? And why shouldn't they be right—right to put strength first, to uphold law and order, even at the cost of a little bloodshed?"

Dane rose and spread out his hands. "Why shouldn't they? That's what we must all decide for ourselves. I can't put my faith into words. You must settle it with your own conscience. It's not a matter of experience; it's a matter of principle. I can't act without you. Think about it from now until this evening. That gives you about six hours. Then let me know what you have decided. Let me have the report and I'll make a copy of it. I'll send it back to you afterwards."

Rhona was frightened at the idea of being left alone with such an issue.

"Major Dane, did he *want* us to tell?"

"There again you must decide. As for your husband——" He stopped abruptly, as though checking the persuasions he wished to urge, and moved for the door.

He turned, unsmiling, to say good-bye, and added as though

against his will, "I know it's hard, but perhaps you understand that I can't help you."

When he had gone, Rhona set to work to think as she had never thought before. Yet when five hours had passed and she saw that it was four o'clock, she was in despair. She was terrified because Cavell might appear at any moment, and she did not know what she was going to say to him. This fear at having no plan paralysed her mind until half-past four, when she became angry that he had not come. He was going to leave her, yet he could not find time to be with her. She could play the same game. She began to change into her riding habit, panting, in desperate haste to be gone before he came. Just as she mounted, Dane's orderly came with a note. It was a typewritten copy of Blaker's report. Why had he kept the original? Frowning over this, but not distrusting his judgment, she rode up the nullah, away from the native village and the camp. In her pocket was Blaker's letter to her. Burn it! What woman in a hundred could burn a man's last letter to her, and a love letter too? She galloped up the track, afraid that Cavell might see her. Afraid? Yes, she was afraid, sickeningly afraid.

She rushed through the trees, stooping and swaying to avoid the branches, and making slightly upwards to the foot of a hill that rose, as African hills do rise, suddenly, like a child's castle upon the shore. Here she halted. Here she would think. But her pony fidgeted: his muscles twitched under her knees, and the orderly watched her unblinkingly. She dismounted, sent him away with the ponies, and sat upon a stone.

She had not got away unseen. Rankin had followed her leisurely through the haze of thorn branches, by her tracks. Presently her orderly emerged from the trees to say, "Sahib come." Rankin rode up, looked down at her smiling, dismounted, and sat upon the sand, with a grace peculiar to himself. When the four ponies and the two orderlies were beyond the screen of the bush, he turned and said:

"Well?"

It was impossible to be distant with Rankin when he smiled like that. Quite confident of his reception, he tossed away his helmet and rearranged his black hair, which was really too long for an adjutant.

"I followed you here," he said, pouring sand over the toe of her long boot, "because I saw that you wanted to be alone. I beg your pardon? Oh, you didn't say anything! Yes, because you were alone. Because, you see, when you've been alone all day and then you gallop off to be alone just at the hour

when there is every reason for you not to be alone—well, you see, you must admit, mustn't you ? "

" What ? "

" That it's a very good thing I came after you. Tell me, Mrs. Cavell, do you think more harm is done by confiding or by keeping silence ? By confiding, of course, you say. That's the English answer, as certain as milk chocolate out of an automatic machine. You're wounded—keep silence. You're lonely —don't admit it. You're happy—don't share it. Don't you think it's rather hard on a lone Celt, living in this jolly Stonehenge sort of circle ? Don't you think that you, particularly, might have been nicer to me ? "

Rhona, who had been donning her armour, piece by piece, at the threatened assault upon herself, was suddenly disarmed by this last move.

" *You !* " she cried. " Is something the matter with *you ?* "

Rankin laughed softly and long without explaining his laughter. Then he said :

" Do you still cling to the notion that men are different from women ? You will make fewer mistakes in life if you apply all you know about yourself to all the men you know, though, of course, you will still make some mistakes. Does a man *like* being far away from his home ?—I haven't got one, but that makes no difference. Does a man like living in the tents of Philistia ? Does he *like* discomfort and drought and death ? The answer is, yes, with a part of himself, but all the other parts are sore and need sympathy so much . . . so much that we're sometimes driven to ask for it . . . shamelessly . . . like this."

" Yes. I am selfish. Go on telling me."

" Temperament, Mrs. Cavell, won't do in Africa. It's a feature the race has developed in Europe. Types in which it is strongly marked decline and sometimes perish when transplanted to this continent. According to how much we have of it, by so much we suffer. It's a matter of vulnerability. You have watched a fish upon the land. That's how I feel in this clear air, with its naked sand and the naked sun, amongst trees that have no leaves, and rivers that have no water. I can't live in it. I must have moist air, with a land drenched green, and a sky washed every day with water and a mist creeping up each side of the day."

" But if things are so bad, why did you come ? and why did you stay ? "

" I don't always feel like this. If one were always miserable it wouldn't be so bad. One would either get used to it, or one

would shoot oneself. Even you"—he stopped playing with the sand to look at her—"even you are not always miserable." Once more she began feeling for her armour, though with far less decision. But again he dropped the offensive. "The Somal, you see, is perfectly suited, by the long process of nature, to live in this country. Isn't he?" She nodded. "Well, what manner of man is he? He is out for himself, unhampered by any hypocrisy. He doesn't waste time deceiving himself or anyone else about that. He is infinitely brave and enduring, not on anybody else's account, but upon his own. He must be, if he is to survive. He has no dreams, no scruples. He can't afford any superfluities either in material or mental equipment. We're the antithesis of the Somal. Therefore, we're absolutely unsuited to this country. Either we shall change the country and make it into one of England's imperial suburbs, or else—— Are you bothering to listen?"

"Yes," said Rhona, knowing that these generalities were hovering about her own particular problem.

"Or else our top-heavy civilisation will crash, because, for all its great scientific achievements, its morals are clumsy, and it has no intention. And sometimes I wonder if the Somal will not then be found still walking the land, no better and no worse than he is now, only, because he has survived, proved perfect. And the moral of *that* is, Mrs. Cavell?"

"What?" asked Rhona, quite content to be stupid.

"Be cruel—be selfish—be economical with your silly Western emotions."

"Oh!" cried Rhona, joining issue at last with the personal and particular. "You don't really mean that. It's a dreadful thing to say just when—oh, I hate you clever, talkative people!"

"Well," said Rankin, still hovering, but with his eyes shining, and ready to swoop at any moment now. "Of course, it's no good expecting what is impossible. I hate creatures stuck half-way, don't you? If you can't go back and be a beast, you'd better go forward and be an angel."

"I don't understand," said Rhona, leaning back upon her hands, away from him.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Cavell?" Rankin rolled over flat in the sand and held her by her boot from edging away any further. "Let's be kind to one another. I'm desperately miserable. I've told you. You're miserable. Tell me. Let's help each other. Don't be frightened of me. I'll never give you away. We'll just think aloud in each other's presence. There's no crime in that, you silly Englishwoman! It isn't

as if I loved you. I don't. Not a bit; I just like you. And that's why I can help you. And I have something to tell you, a piece of advice that's wonderfully important, and you need it before you can become a martyr or an angel. Ah! you will tell me why you're unhappy—why you're unhappy about Blaker."

The sun was very low when Rankin rode away, leaving Rhona alone. Her legs were cramped in her boots with sitting still for so long. She called her orderly to the foot of the hill, and then turned to climb it on foot. It was difficult; the big stones, uncemented by any earth were loose to her feet. It was like climbing a Golgotha heaped with skulls. Yet she went on. She had never climbed a hill like this. There was nothing to eat upon hilltops, and neither man nor beast in Somaliland climbed them. At last she was above the belt of trees and sat down to rest.

The grey trees were outlined against the sky. Some destroying giant might have passed that way flattening out the branches with the palm of his hand and crippling the trunks. Poised above the valley, Rhona could see how it lay, east and west. From above, the bitter trees looked velvet, and about the river-bed they made a winding, rich line. The walls of the valley rose naked. Here and there the escarpments were broken by ridges, like buttresses, projecting.

There was no sign of life. The trees, sparse though they might be, cloaked the life of the valley like clouds half-way up a mountain. Rhona felt as though she had left her body behind her and that only her spirit had come above the trees to the top of the hill. When she went down again her refreshed spirit should be the captain of her life. If there were no God, she would be her own goddess in this unhappy country.

She turned and saw a little pink flower, bare of leaf, tied down fast amongst the stones. She was so used to the idea that flowers grow to make the world beautiful for us that she stared at this little creature amazed. Perhaps no one had ever climbed that hill except herself. Yet there was the flower, with its complex organisation and its beauty. Was creation a futility at which to mock, or a miracle at which to worship?

"Poor little flower!" said Rhona, leaning over it and cupping it in her hands. "No one would ever have seen you, if I had not come. In this country everything just lives, suffers, dies—dumbly. Rankin was right. If anything is beautiful, no one sees it; if anything is gentle, so much the worse for it. There

is no pity, but I am going to do what I can for these people, whatever it cost me."

The sun, sinking on to the Western ridges, fell into a great cluster of clouds, which turned black as they caught it. Their rims were fired, and from every rent in their sides the light sprang out like the trumpets of the Cherubim. A moment they held their royal captive, then he slipped below them, sent one level stare up the valley, mingling his gold with the furthest hills, which turned black and jagged at his touch. Only one far-flowing spar of light caught the highest shoulder away in the East, and made of it an opal, so pale and so far that it seemed to tremble against the sky.

It was a moment of very high spiritual exaltation for Rhona. Loneliness, strangeness and beauty waited upon her mood. She sat, her arms gripped with all her strength about her knees, her eyes, steady and shining, fixed upon the afterglow. The Rhona of the plains, of the last few months, seemed a base little figure to the Rhona of the hill and the sunset. Her talk with Rankin—had she been wise to say so much?—had cleared her mind. What she had done and what she must do was written in bold letters. She must no longer crawl in the valleys with her eyes on the ground, looking for this week's safety, next month's contentment. Her soul had almost died in her. But a spark of the divine fire had remained, and she would keep it and nurse it back into flame. This was the mount of transformation. The thought linked her mind to another exalted moment of the past, when she had worshipped in the little Dorse church with the same shining eyes. Lines, beating to a sugary rhythm, passed through her mind.

> "For ever we would gaze on Thee,
> O Lord upon the Mount;
> With Moses and Elias see
> That light from Light's own Fount."

She stood up and stretched out her arms. She thought that the life beating in her veins down to her feet was inspired and went more hotly and quickly. One or two low stars were struggling with the last light as she looked up. Change after change overtook the sky and the land. The earth crouched in shadow as if afraid of the night, which came on like a magnificent bears of prey. Rhona, a speck on the hill, was not at all afraid. The other night when she had stood between the sand and the stars and vowed never to see or serve the needs of the country seemed far away. Intoxicated with the splendour of her enterprise she

felt no sense of insignificance. Only some brooding god who could have looked north and south of her for two or three hundred miles of darkening bush and seen her resolution like a little flame burning alone on the hill, could have measured it. There are some jests that can only be seen from heaven.

"We must descend and fight," sang Rhona, scrambling down the pale stones towards the ponies.

XVIII

CAVELL was very surprised when he rode home at half-past five and found that Rhona was out. He guessed her motive at once and smiled. He always admired spirit, even when he knew he must destroy it. He called for a drink and sat for ten minutes' well-earned rest on the veranda. The smile changed into a frown. Ever since that moment when he had softened to Rhona as she lay crumpled upon the bed, and had acted upon impulse, he had lost his confidence. He was angry with her; she had behaved disgracefully, and yet—a new respect for her, if only as an antagonist, was troubling him. As the minutes passed, his plans of punishment grew distasteful. He would be away in the morning. It was an important occasion. Just for once he would descend from his throne and take his leave with an embrace. She was so delightful when he was unexpectedly gracious.

Soft thudding and an occasional jingling of harness came out of the darkness, and a moment later Rhona ran up the path into the light. She did not look sullen. She moved briskly and held herself straight. The boy's shape topped by the girl's head seemed beautiful now that it was a picture he was to leave.

"Rhona!"

"You here?"

"Yes. I am going to dine with you, and sleep at the camp. We start early in the morning."

"Then I'd better go and see that there's a jolly good dinner for you." She ran past him and he drew in his hand quickly, hoping with all his heart that she had not seen it. She had almost touched it, but the light was bad. Now she was in the bedroom, preparing to change. He followed her.

"Rhona, don't change to-night. Will you come out to dinner just as you are?"

"But why?" she turned, gripping one half of her hair. "I'm frightfully untidy."

"I'm not dressing." Then, seeing her head had lost just the look of disarray that had pleased him, and hardening against himself and her, "Oh, very well, then!"

Now Rhona had half caught his mood, and her eyes fell.

"Jack, I'm sorry; I would have liked to please you, but it's no good . . . doing little things, because, after dinner, I've got to do something that will make you feel quite different."

"I see," said Cavell, stiffening to a resolution to punish her, and including his own weakness in the reckoning against her. "Very well, the sooner we get dinner over the better."

The meal took about half the usual time and soon they were alone on the veranda, playing with coffee cups, and facing each other across the table.

"It's this," began Rhona, as if answering a question: "I'm going to interfere with you—I mean with your work. I've always tried to see it through your eyes, to agree with you where I could, and to keep my mouth shut where I couldn't. Now, suddenly, I know, and I think I've known for some time, that your policy is unworthy. And it matters—matters to me and to our relations with each other. I can't keep it out!"

"Who's got at you?" With the instinct of the diplomat, Cavell restrained himself until the situation became clearer.

"I speak for myself and my own conscience, Jack. If there are men in this country who put its interest before their own, and have kept some sense of justice and pity, then I am on their side."

Quickly Cavell's memory ran back over other interviews when this spirit of insurrection had shown itself. He remembered how he had beaten it down then. He knew at once that those methods would not serve now; Rhona was changed, she was moved to the bottom of her soul, but she was strong and steady both in looks and voice. She spoke from her brain as well as from her heart. She was clearly prepared for the worst he could do. He would not have the advantage of surprise.

"I know," she went on, "that it is clean against the rules for women to interfere. I don't care. Why should I, when all my love and happiness depends upon what you do—upon what you are? This expedition—it is not right. I believe that you honestly think it is right, and that this country needs a lesson. You believe that we must have a different set of standards in dealing with natives. You are given a free hand at Zeila, and you are going to punish the people because they have killed a D.C. No one knows how it happened, so two companies are

sent, and if they raise hell so much the better. Governors don't send troops to make a judicial investigation."

"Did you learn this by heart?"

"No," she answered, surprised herself at the cold passion to which she owed her eloquence. "Listen, Jack! I know who killed Blaker and why. I have had a letter from him, written just before he was killed, with the whole wretched story in it. He left it to me to decide whether to use it or not, for it discredits him." She put Dane's copy of the report on the table and, getting up, went across and knelt beside his chair: "Jack, I beg of you with all my heart and soul to pause before you decide. I have loved you so deeply and thought so much of you. Surely it isn't in you to put your own ambition before justice, before human life. If I tell you that only one man is responsible for Blaker's death, and that Blaker admits he was to blame, surely you will not ignore this and punish a whole town? Don't tell me that I do not understand, or that this has nothing to do with me. I've tried so hard to tell myself that. You can't think it is anything but hateful to me to cross you like this. Tell me I am wrong to distrust you and I will beg your pardon out of the dust. Oh, if you knew how much I wanted to love you again!"

She clung to him as she threw all her spiritual energy into the entreaty. He unloosed her hands.

"Don't you think, before we begin this sort of thing, you'd better explain yourself a little more clearly."

She stood up and took the paper in her hands.

"It is all in here. It rests with us what use to make of it."

Cavell stood up.

"Wait." He leaned over the table. "Do you fully realise what this means if you go on with it?"

"How can I?" She looked up and bore his gaze: "How can I when it rests with you? If you are a gentleman, you will read this and act by it. Either you and your Governor are just or you are unjust. What else will it mean?"

"Don't lie to me. You know this means something more than politics, or justice and injustice. It means you against me; it means the end of our married life. Well?"

"Well, even if it means that——" These were terrible words for her to say, and a terrible silence followed them. "Oh, Jack, don't you see that, whatever I do or don't do, love, marriage is impossible!"

"Between devil and angel?"

"Yes," she said, suddenly sickened.

"Give me the paper." She handed it across to him and walked into the sitting-room. She sat by the window and waited. He was a very long time reading it. In the silence her calmness ebbed away. She had done her duty. She had been strong for that. Now she had only her own sufferings to reckon with.

When he came in, he was so much master of himself that she could not tell what line he was going to take. She only knew that the offensive had passed into his hands.

"You've a curious idea of friendship, Rhona. When he was alive, you wouldn't hear a word against your young paragon. Anyone could have told you. Now he's dead, you want to blacken his name."

"To save life."

"To save life—from a cold-blooded butcher, your husband. What do you know of me that you should jump to the conclusion that I am going to Zeila to massacre innocent tribes-people. Isn't it strange that, though you know nothing of your husband as a soldier, you should choose to assume that he is a sort of Nero? Just for interest's sake, when did you begin to hate me?"

"I don't hate you!"

"Do you love someone else?"

"You know I don't."

"Then you've fallen in love with Somaliland. It's not very attractive; when I brought you here I hardly imagined it would come between us."

"It has. Oh, Jack! if you would try to understand me for one moment, instead of taunting me. I was brought up in a certain way; I've certain ideals. They may seem sentimental to you. I can't help that. They're mine; they're me. When I live to please you, I'm nothing, neither myself nor you. Look what I've done to please you! I broke with Blaker—poor Blaker!—who trusted me so. . . . I learned to play a part with all these men to please you; I killed birds and animals . . . I hated Major Dane; I closed my eyes to all the misery about me. For two weeks of that frightful drought I let people die all round me, without lifting a finger——"

"Until my pernicious influence was removed and Dane came along to save your soul."

"Yes."

For a moment Cavell considered this. But he was too assured to suffer much from jealousy. That Dane had roused the school-girl mawkiness in Rhona was clear; that a man like Dane could darken his image for a moment in the girl's heart

was impossible. He thought of Dane—shabby, awkward, dull—with no soul above his trees and his court-work. Besides—who should know it if not himself? Rhona was still more girl than woman, capable of a girl's hero-worship, but not yet awake to the full meaning of a woman's love. Dane had injured him, but not in this way.

"You remember what I said to you last time we disagreed? I explained my point of view. Apparently, reasoning is wasted upon you. There's a twist towards treachery in your nature."

"You don't believe that! You say these cruel things just to hurt me. You know that I have right on my side."

"I know that a man who allows his wife to interfere with his work, to dictate to him, to intrigue against him——"

Rhona stood up and held out her hand to stop him.

"Oh, never mind me! There's no time for you to start abusing me. There are more important things at stake than our relations. If you were a strong man, even if you hated me for crossing you, you would do what you know is right. What are you going to do?"

"That remains to be seen."

The typewritten sheet lay on the table between them. Rhona picked it up and glanced through it, re-reading, without understanding the words, to gain time to control herself. Then she repeated quietly:

"What are you going to do?"

"What do you think? Give 'em hell at Zeila, only seven times hotter because of this."

Afterwards, Rhona wondered if this should be taken seriously only as a thrust at herself. At the moment she believed him.

"Very well; I've done all I could. I've appealed to you. Now I will work against you—intrigue, you call it. I'll move heaven and earth to stop you."

"You may move heaven, my dear, but I don't see exactly how you'll get the earth in motion."

Rhona did not see for the moment. She groped for a plan.

"I'll write to the Governor." Cavell laughed. "I'll write home; I'll make it public. There's my uncle." Cavell's exclamation enlightened her. "He's in office again, or just going to be. Very well, I'll send a copy of this to the Governor and another to my uncle, and woe betide you, if all you do at Zeila won't bear examination!"

She was looking straight at Cavell when she said this, and saw his face change, so that for the first time he looked ugly.

Yet he had not really changed. All that she saw was the intensification of lines already there. She realised, when she saw it thus deepened, that the expression on his face was not good. She saw the real man, and he was a stranger. All her loving and the illusions with which she had disguised him fell away from him. He was hers no longer, but a man whom she hated. How glad she was that she had found a way to hurt him!

"You're mad!" he said. "You're not worth argument. Give me that paper." She put it behind her back. He walked across and took hold of her. She choked back the cry that came. There could be no crying to black servants. But she resisted him in a wild and foolish way. His thumb-nail ran deep into her taut knuckles. Holding her hands and the letter in them he picked her up and ran through to the bedroom, where he dropped her upon the bed, and, with a last wrench, prized open her exhausted hands. He looked at the copy, then burned it over the lamp. He came back to the bed.

"Now Blaker's letter to you!" She may have made a slight movement, or he may have guessed. He pinned her shoulder down with one hand, thrust the other into her dress, tearing it as he dragged out the folded paper. It was not strange he should have gone to that hiding-place, for Rhona had told him, the week of their marriage, how she had always kept his letters there. She thought of that now, and how he had kissed her just where the skin burned angrily between her breasts from his hand. Still lying, she watched his face as he read; when he had finished, he gave her a look of savage contempt, and burned it over the lamp, like the other. She half-rose to protest. It was as though he were injuring Blaker, not herself. Poor Blaker! It was cruel to blacken his last words. Just as they held his life and his happiness lightly so now they held his letter from the dead. Then she remembered herself and why her husband was burning the papers.

"Burn them! Burn them!" she cried. "You haven't helped yourself. The first paper you burnt was only a copy. As for the letter—there's another one to Major Dane."

Cavell swore some oath strange to her. He stepped across and struck her. He struck her repeatedly, how often she did not know. Nor did she notice the names he called her. She thought of her father and brothers, and how they had tried to stop her marrying this man. They had known, and Dane knew. Only she had never known. She held herself rigid, keeping her eyes fixed upon him; that stopped him at last. He leaned a moment against the end of the bed, trying to collect himself.

Rhona lay still, praying for him to go. He, too, wanted to go; but packing must be done in spite of the figure on the bed. He called hoarsely for his boy, and for another half-hour the two moved about, mostly in silence, now and then with a muttered word or two. When he had sent the boy on with his things, he paused by the bed on his way through.

"Good-bye!" he said. She lay without moving, her face turned away. He waited for a moment, then went out.

XIX

"But, Sahib, I do not know. I swear I do not know." Jama Dane's trusted sergeant of police, wriggled uneasily as he stood at attention on the D.C.'s veranda.

"What oath will you swear?" asked Dane, and caught the moment's hesitation. They were talking in Somali, and Dane went on with all the emphasis he could lay hold upon. "Jama, it is your duty, as police sergeant, to know. I have eyes and ears for all the big things; you are my eyes and ears for all the little things. Haji Aden is not a small man. When he goes, all he bazaar says, 'Behold! Haji Aden has gone. He has gone north to Berbera, to speak to the Burra Sahib,' or 'He has gone east to count his cattle on the grazing grounds.' Now, Jama, what do they say in the bazaar to-day?"

Jama hung his head like a sullen child. Dane calculated. At any other time he might have threatened to degrade him, for the matter was serious. But now, could he afford to put his threat into action? This was not the time to change sergeants. He must try something else. "Very well, then, Jama; when those who should see and hear for me are deaf and blind, what can I do? I must see and hear for myself. And I have heard what they say, or what they whisper, in the bazaar. It is this: 'Heard you the news? Haji Aden has ridden towards the Gadabursi country. And he took no leave of the Hakim Sahib, as is his custom. What, think you, is the meaning of that?' And then they whisper still more softly, do they not?"

"Sahib," gasped Jama. Dane looked down, smiling with his mouth, lest Abdullah should read the shock in his eyes.

"Listen, Jama! for this is an order. Let there be no foolish talk amongst the police, unless any of you is tired of good work and good pay. You are a people of fools. No evil is intended against you because the two companies have gone to Zeila. But if the people talk jackal-talk, and run up and down, and bark and do evil, then will the companies come back, and the Burra

Sahib will be angry. So let there be quietness, and if any man must talk, let him come and talk to me; and if there is a wrong, I will put it right. Go!"

Jama saluted, wheeled round, and vanished. Dane remained, frowning at his fingers. Three days had passed since the companies had filed away before the dawn. Each day he had become more uneasy. Generally he could read Hargeisa like an open book. He hardly knew how he gathered information. He absorbed it from fifty sources. Now it was as though a fog had stolen over the district. Men who always talked freely to him were silent. Faces he could generally read had turned into masks. Eyes which used to meet his dropped before him. He had known such fogs before, but, in all his years in Somaliland, never one so thick. He could not see a step before him. He had made a bold guess about Haji Aden, but exactly what the chief's silent departure meant he had not guessed. Accustomed as he was to natives, the idea that Haji Aden had betrayed him was bitter, if only to his pride.

A step on the sand made him look up. Rankin, on foot, was strolling up the path.

"Hullo!" he called. "Looking very savage; what's up?"

"Nothing," said Dane, after a very small pause.

"One of our men missing this morning. Deserted, I think."

"Who?"

"You wouldn't know him—Hersi Fara."

"Married to a Gadabursi woman. There was a case about her dowry. You won't see *him* again."

"It's lonesome over there," said Rankin, yawning. "I miss old Durell's cheery face. Never could stick Cheetham. Always talking about his relations. If a fellow's so beastly interbred the best thing he can do is to keep his mouth shut about it."

"Two chaps can't mess together in Africa without loathing each other sooner or later. If you were living here, you'd be across with Cheetham now, calling me a damned old death's head."

"Why, so you are." He sat down. "If you'd been the O.C., Dane, would you have left your missis here at this moment?"

"Rankin, if I married, I'd chuck up this service altogether."

"I wonder? You love it, you know."

"Well! I haven't married."

"You'd have made a jolly good husband."

"You old idiot, Rankin. You're as keen on introspective conversations as the Doctor on a drink. There's no hour of the

day you wouldn't jump at one. Do you know it's half-past nine in the morning?" He got up. "How's Mrs. Cavell?"

"You might have been round to see."

"She's your responsibility. Cavell made that pretty clear when we saw him off, didn't he?"

"Oh!" said Rankin with delight. "And that hurt your feelings?"

"No. It only made me think Cavell was even more of a dam' fool than I thought before."

"Splendid!" Rankin jumped up. "Well, I was there for hours last evening. She's rotten. A mass of nerves."

"Nerves?"

"Oh, not that kind. She's an artless child, for all her airs. Her present philosophy of life is one of Nihilism. All men are liars, black and white. Somaliland is hell. And life is not worth living."

"She said all that?"

"What *do* you think? Of course she didn't; that was the undercurrent. She thought I couldn't see through the froth on the surface."

"You should have been a priest, Rankin," said Dane, moving off towards the court. "They would have made you an expert in the confessional. The force of heredity I supposed, Priestcraft and Fenianism. So long!"

Rankin stood a moment.

"Quite nasty about it, by Jove!" He chuckled and strode back to camp in high good humour.

Dane walked slowly along the track. His orderly fell in behind him. On his right was the place where his plantation should have been. Here and there, where a little pocket had been left to catch the water, he had planted a tree, and this mottled confusion of sand with a couple of dozen delicate trees standing about in it was all that remained. He went out of his way to look at the trees, then changed his mind.

His experiments were over. The only fruit of them lay in a long report, lying dusty on a shelf at the Secretariat. Blaker was dead; and Cavell was jubilantly on the march to Zeila. He was defeated all along the line; and every time by the same man. There had been times when Dane had been threatened with despair, but he had never felt before the curious lack of interest that came to him now. It was as though what happened to Somaliland was not of great importance. His responsibility was over. If trouble came, it was of others' making, and he had no intention of taking heroic action to save the situation

once more for the benefit of the Colonel and the Governor. He had done his best for the country, and his work, which was that of a life, had been thwarted.

One intention remained. The hatred that had gripped him at times before and kept him sleepless was now always with him. The change had come the night when the animals rushed the dam. Every incident of that half-hour was cut clear in his mind. The more he looked at it the more sure he became that Cavell had seen the animals coming before he gave his orders. As for Blaker—to Dane, Cavell's hand was red, and that he should go to avenge the boy was a jest of a grimmer kind than the admiration he had won for his attempt to save the dam.

Most of us have one vital issue upon which so much turns that we decree it beyond the reach of ethical discussion. Dane had come to a state of mind in which there could be no question of foul means in injuring Cavell. His plans were not at all certain, but they found their centre in Cavell's wife. For some reason that he did not understand he had power over her. He had often had men's allegiance and made them work for him. For the first time he felt that he could make a woman work with him and for him. What else he might do only the moment could show.

"Sahib!" Lurgeh was overtaking him. Dane turned. In the background was a bush-Somal, an alert, unkempt person.

"What is it?"

Lurgeh answered, well knowing the importance of what he said.

"Yusuf Ali, Sahib. This jungli man says he is waiting there in the bush."

Yusuf Ali was Haji Aden's uncle.

"Let him come out and speak. The Hakin Sahib does not talk behind bushes."

"He says all the bazaar will know and talk."

"The bazaar will surely know, Lurgeh, wherever Yusuf Ali and I have speech." He hesitated. It was to his advantage to be seen talking to Yusuf Ali, but he could not afford to let slip a chance of piercing the fog. "Let Yusuf Ali go to my house. I will see him there."

He kept the old man waiting two hours while he worked in a court which was listless, because it was no longer the centre of interest. Then he went home. Yusuf Ali rose at his entrance, like the aristocrat he was, and Dane ran his eyes over the fine figure and face, scarred with hard living. The big bones of his

head stood clear under the wrinkled skin, and far back in their sockets his intelligent eyes met the white man's steadily.

They passed some moments in the preliminary compliments which, after the long years, came almost as naturally to Dane as to the old chief. Then he waited for the other to unfold his news: he was long working towards it. At last:

"You know my brother's son, Aden, was called from Hargeisa. The business was such that he could not take his leave of you."

"Who called him, Yusuf Ali?"

"I will show the Sahib all that is in my mind. It is known to your wisdom that the Sheikh Abdullah has gone to the Gadabursi country."

"It is known," lied Dane.

"The Gadabursi chiefs of the nearer and further sections have had a great council, and the sheikh called for Aden, for the Gadabursi are often wild and foolish."

"It is a grief to me, Yusuf Ali, that your nephew should listen to the voice of this sheikh. The Burra Sahib has written down his name in a book with the names of the evil men."

"He is a man of authority, Sahib, both in the Habr Awwal and in the Gadabursi country."

"Let it pass. What news have you of your nephew?"

"A runner, a Gadabursi, came to-day with a secret message that no man knows but I and he to whom I tell it. Derea Waraba has collected a great host, many thousands, on the border."

"It is the way of a hyæna to hunt with his jackals, Yusuf."

"This is no common hunting, Sahib. All that are left of the Aden Yunis are with him and the Jibreel Yunis section of the Gadabursi."

The fog was lifted with a vengeance now and Dane saw himself all but on the rocks. He grasped the only line of hope—thrown, it seemed, by a miracle—that Aden had given him warning.

"Whose cattle and whose wives does he covet now? Are the Habr Awwal grown too fat under our protection that he waits his moment to eat them."

The chief was silent a moment, then he said:

"Let not the Hakim Sahib be angry at what must be said. Derea Waraba proclaims now as he ever proclaimed, that Somali men must be either his friends or his prey: I myself have seen that all men are either sheep or hyænas. The Habr Awwal are a flock of sheep and have been these five years, and the Burra Sahib is our sheep-master, who keeps us and feeds upon us and uses us at his pleasure. Derea is a hyæna, and all his followers hyænas. Sahib, shall the Habr Awwal always be sheep?"

"No, Yusuf, for the Habr Awwal will fight and tear the hyænas in pieces, which sheep cannot do."

Again the chief was silent, then he stretched out his brown hand and touched Dane's bare arm.

"Sahib, I can say no more than this. Let the two companies of the Rifles come back and fight Derea, and we will fight with them, and perhaps the Gadabursi also will fight, and an end shall be made of the robbers. Let the company here go out to-day with its rifles and great guns and then we shall believe that the Burra Sahib is our protector and not another man will go to Derea's camp. Thus says my nephew, Aden."

Dane's prophecies had been fulfilled. This was where Cavell and Page had landed Somaliland in less than a year. The whole future of the country hung in the balance. Why should he save the situation for them? A savage hope came to him that there might be bloodshed and ruin if his enemies might be shattered in it. He thought of Samson Agonistes, the place where his Milton always fell open when taken out. Then the old chief spoke again, and for the moment the mood passed. The threat that lay behind the old man's message restored him to the routine of duty.

He sent his visitor away reassured, although unanswered, and set to work upon a long telegram in code.

"Information. Derea Waraba threatening extensive raid. Believe only prompt action will prevent Gadabursi joining him. Habr Awwal threatened and wavering. May 'C' company proceed south-east to frontier immediately. Strongly urge recall of 'A' and 'B' companies."

He sent for Hais and rode to the wireless station to see the telegram transmitted, then across to the Rifles. He found Rankin at orderly room

"Holy Mother of God!" said the Irishman, radiating electric energy at the news. "This is a nice little nut for you to crack, oh Hakim Sahib! Show me the copy of that telegram again. Supposing they let us go? Do you think one company can do anything?"

"It must. It's a matter of moral impression as much as heavy guns, Rankin. Where's Cheetham?"

"Gone sick."

"Sick! What's the matter?"

"Fever. He's as hot as a cinder. Sat up for a leopard last night."

"Curse the fool. These subaltern pups have no sense of

proportion. Couldn't the blamed idiot realise that for once his health was of some importance."

"Tut, tut, Major!" Rankin spread out his hands. "You seem rattled. Are things as bad as all that?"

"Worse; which is Cheetham's tent?" Rankin lounged to the doorway and led the way. The two stooped under the flaps and stood in the shadow. He lay on his low camp-bed, a boy squatting at his side to fan him. Dane, who would have liked to kick the young man, put his hand on his brow, measured him a dose of quinine, and told him not to worry.

Outside again, Rankin asked him when he expected a reply.

"Impossible to say. The Governor will take three days before he answers that."

"And which way will he answer?"

"God knows!"

"But you guess. What are you going to do in the interval?"

"I'm going to see Mrs. Cavell."

Rankin laughed gleefully.

"Well, tell her my life is at her service. I feel just fine for a scrap with some of these Bashi-Bazouks. I'll go and see the machine is oiled; mind you keep me informed!" He sauntered back to the camp, whistling.

As Dane rode under the midday sun up the river-bed, he wondered whether he had not over stated his fears to Rankin. He had been so long in the country and the district that he could hardly picture the tribes he knew so well suddenly in arms against the Government. A movement of the bush-Somals was a more serious portent than the defiance of a town-mob which he had faced not so long before.

He pushed his helmet further back on his head and began to hum a song. Why was he cheerful, he asked himself. Did this climax of disaster to the work of his life weigh so light beside the grim joy that his enemies had failed, or was it because he was master of his own district again, with his blood running swiftly at the call to action? He was weighed down by no sense of responsibility for the trouble. He had no plan as yet, but he wished that he could so handle it that the ex-Governor and his policy should be vindicated at the cost of Page and Cavell. If he could do that, he told himself, he cared little what convulsions shook the country.

Rhona was lying in a long chair on the veranda, a dozen books and three pieces of needlework discarded around her. He was assured enough to observe her carefully. He saw that she was excited at his coming. Her hands played up and down

the sides of the chair. He did not understand that she had been sitting and thinking for three days, hating all men, yet longing for the sight of any man whose coming would make one hour different from the last. As he touched her hand a dangerous sense of their aloneness in Hargeisa—their aloneness in Somaliland—struck him. All the time the thought repeated itself in his mind like a hammer beating deep within a forge.

"What did you do?" he asked her as he sat down in front of her.

"I told him, and I threatened him. He tore up the copy you sent me. He was very angry."

"It did not affect him at all?"

"I can't say that it did. If it affected him at all it was to make him more resolute to get his own way."

"You should have let me speak to him. I stayed in all the evening in case you should send for me. I knew, when you did not send, which way you had decided. I knew more surely in the morning when Rankin and I saw him off, though we had no chance to speak of it. But it was too hard for you!"

"Major Dane!" Rhona sat up. "Whatever you decide to do, I will help you. Blaker's story must be put in the proper hands, and it must be known that my husband knew it."

"And the Governor," he added, staring at her with wide-open eyes. "Blaker said that he had written to him. It is just as well we know that." He hesitated. He did not want to discourage this unnatural initiative, but curiosity mastered him. "Do you know that, in the unlikely event of your succeeding, you might do Cavell very serious harm?"

"I know. I have thought it all out; I have decided that you must write to Sir John Chard and I will write to my uncle. He understands me, and believes in me, and I think he is a great power."

"One of the greatest in imperial matters," he said, still staring, but now at a bracelet upon her hand. What Rhona had just said, and the way she had said it, turned all his little lore of women into nonsense. He looked at her again; her face was as pale as the glass face of an angel in a Church window. The gold hair had no life in it. He could see the lines of her limp body through her thin, white clothes, as she lay back in the chair.

"I must ask you—how can you do this extraordinary thing?"

She seemed to be wondering whether she should answer him.

"Because," she said in the end, "I am completely impartial in this matter. Do you understand?"

The girl had clearly become a woman, and the change puzzled and challenged him. He had come to her with a new consciousness of strength, and he found her even stronger than himself. He wanted to answer the challenge and achieve some kind of victory over her. Meanwhile, the conversation ran on.

"What we are doing," he said, "is very unusual. It may do no good at all. And, at any rate, it can do none to the people at Zeila; it will be too late." He considered whether he should tell her of the new event, but decided that he would first see the Governor's answer. He got up and walked about the veranda. "Rankin tells me you are not feeling well. I am the nearest thing to a doctor in Hargeisa, and you must let me look after you. You are satisfied with the police who have been on duty here?"

"Perfectly. They have been as automatic as machines."

"And you are not nervous?"

"Not at all."

"Or lonely?"

Rhona laughed at this stupid question. She went on laughing so long that he came up to her and saw that this was the wrong kind of laughter. She struggled hard, for she had not cried for three days and nights, and the last thing she wanted was to surrender in his presence. But she was beaten and wriggled round in her chair with the ostrich-instinct to smother her shamed face.

Dane had hardly ever in his life seen a woman cry, and for a moment an enormous embarrassment froze him where he stood. The next moment he saw that Rhona's tears had restored life to its proper proportions. A magnificent contempt for the pitiful figure on the chair rejoiced him. Her weakness tempted him, and he exulted because he knew he was going to yield to the temptation. Yield was no word for such a glorious enterprise. He suddenly thought that he had been good all his life, and if he were now to be wicked, he had earned the right to be so. He moved round Rhona's chair and kneeled in the effort to see her face. She looked up. She knew at once that everything on the veranda was changed. It was like the moment when a nightmare closes round the still-waking mind and everything becomes strange and far away and the air is thick like glass.

It was Dane, of course, who had wrought the spell. She looked at him, and feared and hated him. She saw every detail of the face close to hers, the tousled, sandy hair, growing square from the forehead, the cheek-bones stark under the spare skin, the black and green eyes fixed upon her, boring into her, threatening, hurting her.

"Oh, what's the matter?" she said, fighting with the foolish weeping that was putting her at his mercy. "Please go away, Major Dane."

Words such as he had never even imagined in his mind forced themselves to his lips, and, as he heard them, he knew that they were truer than anything he had ever said in his life.

"My dear," he said. "I can't bear to see you crying; can't I do something to help you and comfort you?" He leant over the arm of the chair and drew her clumsily against him with his arms. "I think I love you, you dear child. You are all alone; you must have someone to love you and look after you. He leaned down and kissed her hair. "Dear, beautiful woman, don't struggle against me. I reverence you as if you were a goddess, and I love you, I love you."

She got herself free, and strained away from him across the further arm of the chair.

"Go away, for Heaven's sake, go away! Do you think you can treat me like this, just because my husband has left me, and I am alone?" They were standing, by now, with the chair between them. "Is this your way of looking after me? Oh, you're despicable! I thought if there was no one else in the world I could trust, I could trust you."

"You can trust me because I love you."

"Love me! Don't dare call *that* love. What you call love makes it necessary for me to find something—someone to protect me against you. As if there wasn't danger and misery enough for me, you must add this. You've a curious notion of chivalry."

"Be quiet! You shan't talk to me like that," said Dane, white with passion and terrified of himself.

"I will say what I want. It isn't often men hear the truth about themselves. Listen, Major Dane; do you know what my husband did to me before he left? He seized me—I have the marks on my arm now—and he flung me on that bed in there, and he struck me with his clenched fist here, and here, and here."

"By God! He did that?"

"Yes, he did. And that's not so bad as what you've done to me. For I knew him by then, and what he did to my body was not of very much importance. But I thought—I almost prayed—that you were something different, that you were like me and could be my friend. And then the first time you find me in your power—oh, how could you spoil everything like this?"

Dane stood silent. He was outraged by her accusation. His whole spirit cried out that he was not what she said he was,

that her picture of him was utterly false. It was intolerable to be so hated and despised. Yet what was there to be said? And because he knew that he loved her it seemed more important that her fear and unhappiness should be taken away, than that he should be vindicated. It was terrible to see her so desperate, with her entire body wrung with misery, and to be the cause of it.

"For God's sake," he said earnestly, "stop being afraid of me! You have nothing in the world to fear. I think you are unjust to me, but that is a small matter. I should not have done what I did; I am sorry. I love you. That means that I care for nothing in the world but to see you happy. I will go away now at once, but not until I see you sitting down there in that chair with your book or your sewing, and not until you promise that you will go over to the camp this afternoon and have tea with Rankin and visit Cheetham, who is sick. Go on! I mean it!"

He stood still, waiting, while Rhona slowly obeyed him, sat down and picked up a book without looking at it. "Now, about this evening. Promise!"

"Very well," she whispered.

He leaned down, took up a fold of her dress, pressed it to his lips, and walked away down the path to the river-bed.

Hargeisa had changed marvellouslyin half an hour. Astarling, like an English starling that had stolen the brightest feathers of the kingfisher and painted his beak and eyelids yellow, glittered across his path. He had never seen such a bright starling. The sun itself so terrible, and yet so small in the huge cloudlessness of the sky, seemed to burn with joy as well as with heat. And the midday silence of the bush was no longer exhaustion; it was as though the land held its breath, tense with the secret of life that it knew. He shared the secret now. He had lived until then without knowing why he lived. He wondered at the sense of duty that had kept him grinding along the track, like a clock-work engine that a child winds up, and that goes on because it must, until the last spring relaxes. Now he saw why people endured life, why they bore loneliness, disillusionment, cruelty and despair. Let the morrow bring what it would. One such golden moment as he knew now justified the greyest life. Rhona might hate him: to-morrow might bring despair. It was enough to love, to be for a second not a man, but a god. Why had he never known the truth before? He was a stale fool at the game of life not to have known that Rhona was the woman he had to love, to have awakened to it only at the sight of tears

in the eyes and at the holding of her shoulders in his arms. Had he ever thought Somaliland's affairs of importance? Spent sleepless nights over gardens? He laughed aloud. Work, duty, politics counted for nothing beside this sublime passion. Filled with a great tenderness for the girl left in his charge and doomed to be Cavell's wife, he vowed himself to her service. Solemnly he resolved never again to give her a moment of distress or fear.

So entire was his ignorance of the thing just born into his spirit.

XX

THIS was the Governor's reply:

"Cannot agree that excessive anxiety about rumoured raid would produce good impression. What signs of Habr Awwal foregoing old feud with Derea? Have 'C' company ready to march, but take no action until Derea attacks Habr Awwal. 'A' and 'B' will return without delay after duty at Zeila. If you think advisable send Cheetham with Mrs. Cavell and small escort to Burao."

Dane and Rankin, sitting alone on the platform of the court-house, read and re-read the telegram before speaking.

"It's exactly what I expected," said Dane. "H.E. has never understood the attitude of the Habr Awwal towards Derea. These people are brigands by blood, and they show a natural preference for raiding over being raided. And if stories come through from Zeila, that won't help matters."

"What do you think will happen?" asked Rankin, falling easily into complete subordination to the D.C.

"It's impossible to say. The Habr Awwal won't make up their minds in ten minutes. And I've just sent a very confidential messenger to find Haji Aden, with a message calculated to make him think. If Derea made a mistake and began hustling them, all would be well. I don't quite know what to expect of Derea. He comes from the Ogaden country away south, but in his youth he was a government mail-runner between Berbera and Burao. Rankin!"

"Well!"

"Do you think 'C' company would take on a Habr Awwal crowd?"

"I don't pretend to know, Major. Discipline's as good as we can make it; but you've got to know this country before you can bank on a thing like that."

"They're mostly Habr Awwal men, you see. That's one reason why I wanted to move out at once against Derea. You see, Derea is feeling his way to the Habr Awwal through the

Gadabursi chiefs. The men would have loved a smack at Derea and the Gadabursi. But we can't risk a mutiny. Chard never meant the Rifles for work like this. Page and Cavell ought to have spent a few years studying the Somal before they lightly ran this risk."

"What about Mrs. Cavell? Cheetham's worse, if anything."

"I don't know." Dane drew designs on the blotting paper. "I'm going to tell her about it. I've got spies working. I doubt anything will happen very suddenly. But if she wants to go, she must. Try heroic measures upon Cheetham. Make the beggar sweat like a sponge."

"What about the company?"

"Make first preparations. There can't be many to make. Don't rouse too much talk. And keep an eye on the black sheep." He rose. "Did Mrs. Cavell go across to the camp yesterday?"

"Yes; she spent an hour with Cheetham and did stables with me."

"How do you think she was?"

"Like a white rag. I made her have a stiff drink and told her what a nuisance sick people were."

"Well, I'll come along and have lunch with you and take a look at Cheetham. So long!"

Hais was being held outside. A couple of hundred natives, dismissed early from the court, lingered in the shade. They watched the D.C. mount and ride away. Dane would have given much to know what lay behind the cool stare they gave him. For once he was deaf to the harsh wailing of the beggars littering the sides of the track.

He trotted slowly past the police lines and the bungalow. Yesterday's glory had gone. A vast depression held him and communicated itself to the loitering Hais. The love that had sucked the reality out of all the rest of life was itself unreal. The barren devotion that had seemed a heaven of satisfaction twenty-four hours ago was now worse than the nothing of the day before.

She was in the sitting-room, writing letters, when he went in. She began to talk eagerly of her letter before he could speak.

"It's so difficult to compose. I don't want to say too much or too little. Will you read it and say what you think?"

"If you like." He took the letter; it was to her uncle. He read it through, and when he got to the end he could not remember a thing he had read.

"Well!" she said. He folded the letter and handed it back to her.

"I hope," he began, "that you will not have to see me any more. What happened yesterday seemed to me at the moment the most beautiful thing in my life. This morning, I see it brands me as an outsider. I have forfeited what little you could give me, your respect and your trust.

"That's over now. The immediate future is all that concerns us. There's considerable danger of trouble in this district, and it is left to my discretion whether or not to send you away."

"Trouble! Here! What kind of trouble?"

He sketched, in a few words, the outline of events, and, in still fewer, the possibilities. He watched to see how much afraid she would be. He felt as dispassionate towards her as a statue.

"Well, if it does lie with you, what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to make a forced ride to Burao. That means you would have to ride like smoke, with two ponies, escorted by Rankin and some police, and I could arrange for the D.C., Burao, to meet you half-way. You would have to attempt the whole journey in two days, because we can't spare a man at either end for more than that."

"You make me feel a hateful nuisance. I remember now that you never wanted me to come at all. Are you always right?"

"Yes, except where being right might be to my own advantage."

"When am I to go?"

"The sooner, the better."

"Have I *got* to go? Do you make it an order?"

"I can't see, myself, that you will be much better off at Burao than here, where you have a company, and the only man who seems able to understand the situation. All the same, you must go. It will be one responsibility less."

He moved as if to go.

"Won't you advise me about the letter?"

"Not now. I am sure it is all right. I shall write Chard this mail and send Blaker's enclosure. He can send it on to your uncle." He paused. "You had better ride Hais."

"I don't want to go," said Rhona, crouching over her writing-table.

"Why not?"

"I don't like the idea of Burao."

"You can go on to Berbera."

"I hate Berbera."

"I want you to go. I can't bear to have you here. I can't do my job properly. And I suppose I am too proud to stand your despising and distrusting me. I wonder you can bear to stay in the district of a man who treated you as I did yesterday."

"You see, I think I love you," she whispered, and put her hands over her face. The words went on repeating themselves in the silence. She could not imagine who had spoken them. It could not have been herself, for she had not known that she loved him. Only, now that the words were spoken, she knew at once that they were true. She kept quite still, terrified of what he would do with her words and with herself.

He pulled her chair round gently, and knelt on one knee so that he could see her bent head, but he did not touch her.

"Rhona! You know what you said!"

"Yes. I have been so miserable since yesterday; I was shocked and frightened. I never expected such a thing to happen with you, of all men. At first it seemed all insult and humiliation. I loathed you and myself. You see, we know how some men play with a thing which is all the world to us. I was awake nearly all night, not thinking, or knowing the truth, just desperate and excited. Now that I've said it, now that I've given myself away, you must be good to me."

She hardly knew his voice when he spoke at last.

"I shall never ask anything else of you. What you have given is so great. You said that you loved me. That makes me your servant for ever. I will not wrong or distress you. Whatever you think right or good, I will do. I swear that, Rhona; you believe me. You are not frightened of me, my dear, my dear?"

She looked up.

"No, I'm not frightened. Oh, but we must be so good! Oh, Dane, I do so want to be good! We must help each other. You won't be like other men, will you? Yesterday—you'll never be like that?"

"God helping me and you. You look so beautiful now; I wish you could see yourself—your glorious eyes. It isn't possible that anything so beautiful could love me—a dull, battered brute like me. I'm nearly forty, Rhona, and you are a child, an ignorant child. It isn't right of me to let you say it: you did say it, dear child, didn't you?"

She smiled.

"Yes, I said it, and it's true. I love you. And you are not to call yourself dull and battered. To me you are a kind

of warrior-saint, a Sir Galahad. I could never tell you what I owe to you. Dane, you must let me call you Dane. I can't suddenly get used to some new Christian name, and I am sure it won't suit you half so well. What was I going to say? I think people can be in love long before they know it, don't you?"

"I'm sure of it."

"I'll tell you, then, when I must have fallen in love with you. It was when you picked up that frightful old *miskeen*, out there, that evening. Do you remember?"

"Do I remember! You gave me back Hais and I was sore and savage. I wanted to hurt you to see what you were really made of. But you understood me completely, and I had a strange moment as if my other self sat there and that, for the first time in my life, everything that I said would be understood, completely understood."

"Did you feel that?" She closed her eyes and smiled, a sweetness possessing her quite unlike the storm that was rising in him and beating against his self-control.

The little clock on her table struck a tremulous note. He stood up, and the perilous moment passed.

"You will stay to lunch, Major Dane?" she said, laughing up at him in sheer happiness.

He shook his head.

"No; I promised Rankin. And I beg to remind you that we're living on the edge of a volcano, and I must keep an eye open for eruptions every now and then. My dear, your precious life is in my charge."

"There's something I want to tell you before you go. I went up the hill over there the night I decided about Blaker's letter. Before that I talked to Rankin, and he said some rather wonderful things. (You must not be jealous of Rankin; I am very fond of him.) On the hill I seemed to find myself; I purified myself. I had been getting very wordly and callous. And I vowed to do what was right, and especially what was right for this country. Dear man, our love must make us better and not worse. If I thought I should interfere with your work I would go to Burao, then to Berbera, and then home."

"Oh, you mustn't do that! No man who loved you could help being better for it."

"You know that's not true," she said; and they were silent a moment.

"Look here, Rhona, one thing you must understand! You're dealing with a man who hates your husband. There's no harm

I wouldn't do him so long as it would not recoil on you. Don't imagine this is a question of policy, of right and wrong ; I hate him with a flesh and blood hatred, and, since you told me what you did about him yesterday, I—well, I'd enjoy the killing of him."

"Whatever you feel about him, and whatever I feel, he's away now, and I am going to play the game by him in every way—in every little way. And you are going to help me."

"I'll try," he said, regarding her gloomily.

"You mustn't only try ; you must succeed. We have so much ; we mustn't want more. Isn't it enough just to know that we love each other, to see each other and be together in Hargeisa."

"Good-bye!" he said. "Don't ask too many questions, dearest. Let me have one long look at you to take away with me. Until this evening, Rhona." He kissed her hand, worshipped her with his eyes, and rode back to the camp.

XXI

Durell, though he disliked Cavell as much as it was in him to dislike anybody, always admitted that he was a good soldier. Nor did he confine the admission to himself. He twice remarked as much to the Doctor as they jogged along beside the head of the column. The Doctor was not much interested. If there was one thing he loathed, it was movement. Though after a process of selection lasting some years he had a pony, the riding of which was like sitting on a rocking-horse swathed in a feather bed, yet his face was set like a grim campaigner. He merely grunted : Cavell was nothing to him just then but a tyrant and a tormentor.

" Yes," said Durell. " Yet I always wonder that he didn't stay in India ; he's cut on the true Indian lines. He comes of an Anglo-Indian family. It's in the blood. I never think, Doc., that he quite understands the Somal."

" No," said the Doctor, his eyes inflexibly fixed upon his pony's head.

" All the same, he looks like making a deuced good job of this."

Cavell's conduct as a commander was like Cavell's appearance, cool and immaculate, with an eye to effect. He never seemed to hurry, yet he always reached his objective at the scheduled time. Any mishap that befell, whether from human frailty or the hazard of the elements, seemed to have been fully expected by him, and the appropriate remedy lay in the front of his mind. His campaigning equipment was perfect ; nothing was forgotten. He never had to borrow, but he always had spares to lend to a foolish subaltern, whether it was spare corkscrews or an extra saddle.

As keeping in his stirrups and speculating about the next drink seemed all the Doctor could think about at the moment, Durell rode on in silence. He looked up and down the column. The slow swinging camels, their riders seven feet in the air,

lolloped beside him. Men and animals were perfect in condition and equipment. Was it middle-age that gave him a contented moment at finding himself part of such a well-oiled machine, without the responsibility of keeping it running? Would it all have worked so smoothly had he been in command? Yet Dane would have staked all that he had that he was the better man. He wondered whether Dane was as intelligent as he had always thought.

It was good work upon Cavell's part to have given this impression: no one knew that he was anything but contented and eager for the end of the task. They had not noticed that he had fallen behind shortly after the start and stood a moment amongst the trees with his head bowed in thought, dealing with the impulse to gallop back to the bungalow upon the cliff, still wrapped in the last hour of night. He gave them no chance during the eight days of the trek to guess that at the back of his mind lay a picture which haunted: it was that of a woman's form flung upon a bed, and lying still just as it had been flung. All the time he wanted to go back to see if that form was still lying there, just as when he had left; yet at the same time was the conflicting desire to reach Zeila, for Zeila meant action, and action an end to sickly meditations.

On the eighth day they reached the escarpment. They crawled down its five-thousand-foot drop to the maritime desert, wound through the broken hills at its base and traversed fifty miles of sheer sand until the horizon in the north became blue.

This was the long expected moment. At its coming, Cavell should have turned from the man to the soldier, the creature of his training, emptied of all emotion but ambition. He stiffened in his saddle and held up his hand.

The leading company swung into line as it came to the halt. The scouts on the flanks faced outwards. Away in front the men reined in their animals and adjusted the intervals between them. "B" company, with a "swish-swish" of padded camel feet and a jingle of accoutrements, formed up behind "A."

"Dismount!"

The weary camels knelt. The men got up stiffly, stretched their limbs, and set to work adjusting saddles and straps.

Cavell watched the halted companies a moment and then walked fifty yards further along the track, his orderly alone following him. He gazed across the sand towards the spot where Zeila made a white blur far to the north.

He had had his plan drawn up in his mind to the smallest detail. A hundred times he had thought out just how he would

act upon such an occasion, and in the last ten days he had applied his schemes to this place and this moment. How was it that, now with Zeila in front of him and the waiting companies behind, he was suddenly considering action of an entirely different kind? It could hardly be because he had left Rhona lying beaten upon her bed. It was true that he had been unable to form any picture of what she was doing since he had left her, and was pursued by the absurd thought that she was still lying there, and would so lie, until he went back and raised her up. But then he knew quite well that he was not the sort of fool who mixes up thoughts of women with his work. Was it because of the information Rhona had threatened to put into such dangerous hands? If the girl had the pluck to send it, things might be awkward for him. But if he acted now under the constraint of this fear, there would certainly be an end of him, an end of his prestige with men and officers who had been taught to expect very different things from him, an end of his hold over Rhona, an end of his own self-respect. From the arrival of Page as Governor until this moment everything had played into his hands. Was he now, of his own folly, to chuck her gifts back in the face of destiny?

"Officers!"

Durell and the others doubled up to him, and, standing at attention, waited. Cavell pointed to the north.

"There is our destination, gentlemen, and this is my plan. 'A' company will take up position ready for action, four hundred yards to the south of the white mosque, an unmistakable mark, the first building on the road to the town. 'B' company will detach a troop to the right that will come into position near the beach, east of the town; another troop will do the same on the western side; the gulf of Aden to the north cuts off all escape to that side. Remaining troops of 'B' company will stand by to the rear of 'A' company, ready to hasten to the support of either detachment.

I myself will be with 'A' company near the mosque, where all reports must be sent. Officers in charge of detached troops must clearly understand that, though they are to be prepared for all eventualities, they must under no consideration whatever assume the offensive, unless attacked."

"And if attacked, sir?" asked Durell.

"I shall come to that in a moment," said Cavell, glance and voice a rebuke for the interruption. "I intend to give these Zeilawes one hour in which to evacuate the town. At the end of that time both Stokes guns will bomb the buildings for fifteen

minutes, just as quickly as they can loose off. When the advance is sounded, the two detached troops will send back their led animals to 'A' company and the men will enter the town and fire everything that will burn. They will find paarffin and matches in the native shops. And, please understand, that although nothing must be spared, looting is strictly forbidden.

"And, gentlemen, if by any chance one hostile shot is fired, or one spear thrown, open fire without further orders; any sustained fire will be the signal for a general attack. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good; go back to your posts. In ten minutes we advance on the town. Make what use you can of that time to overhaul guns and bombs."

Durell hesitated.

"One word, sir."

"What is it?"

"I want to speak to you alone."

"Fall back, gentlemen! Well, what is it, Durrell?"

"All is not well with 'B' company, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"All is not well with 'B' company, sir. That is all. I do not think the men are to be relied upon."

"For what reason?"

"That I cannot say. I simply state what I believe to be a fact. I thought it my duty to tell you."

"Major Durell, if you ever say this sort of thing again to me I rather think the M.R. will have to dispense with your valuable services. Fall in, and see to it that 'B' company does its duty, or, by God! you'll find all will not be well with you. Not another word; go!"

The two companies advanced quickly over the sand and the troops took up their positions without any hitch. As Cavell rode up to the mosque he found a deputation awaiting him, a grizzled, nervous crowd—mullahs and influential townsmen who had a great deal to say and were clearly out for anything but war. Now was the moment to halt and take thought, to make enquiry for Ibrahim, the assassin. Since Durell's intervention, however, Cavell's resolution had stiffened. A cold fury possessed him. He gave an order and the old men were hustled into line in front of him. The Stokes mortars were set up. Newsome stood by the guns, watching Cavell as he spoke.

"This is not the time for talk. I am here to punish. Hold your tongues and turn your eyes to that old ruin five hundred

paces to the right of where I stand." He turned to Newsome "Commence!"

Five Stokes bombs were dropped into the mouths of the great black guns; five low reports and a flight of slow-sailing missiles through the air. In dead silence they watched the old mosque. Newsome had laid truly: the bombs burst in rapid succession with terrific explosions, chunk after chunk of the walls was struck and crumbled down in clouds of dust.

The reverberation died away. Cavell stayed for one second, staring, like all the others, at the great cloud shifting westward from the wreckage. Then he turned.

"In one hour from now, and not one second later, a rain of such bombs will fall upon your accursed town. That is all I have to say, and to nothing from you will I listen. Go! Warn your people, and save what you can."

The old men turned and ran back into the town, calling out to the people as they ran. There followed an hour of wild confusion. The people, unprepared and bewildered, seemed to have no thought of resistance. Mats, bottles and skins were flung out of huts and houses; the women ran hither and thither, screaming and hindering the workers. The hour was all too short. Little had been saved when the people began to stream untidily out of the town towards a chain of wells inland.

A bugle rang out. Cavell nodded to Newsome, who turned to the guns with the order:

"Rapid fire!"

For fifteen minutes the long peace of the seashore was racked by the continuous explosions of the shells. Here and there pieces of straw huts sprang into the air. Sometimes a stone building cracked and slid down into a heap of stones. Above the town stood a vast cloud of dust and smoke, which the wind slowly edged towards the west.

The guns ceased. The advance sounded, and the detached troops closed into the town. Not a rifle shot had been fired or a spear thrown. The people were still filing southward over the sand. Some stayed to stare back at the destruction of the town.

"Sheep!" said Cavell angrily to himself, as he watched.

The troops were slow in firing what was left of the town. Now and then figures could be seen moving in and out of the huts amongst the dust. How much the officers did of the business, Cavell could not see. His feet twitched in the stirrups. At last it was well alight. The flames moved amongst the dust like great red flowers bursting one after another into blossom. Their ragged petals waved in the wind.

Cavell turned to Scott and the Doctor, who were sitting on their ponies not far from where he stood.

"The whole place is empty. Go on to the bungalow," he pointed to the large white house east of the town and standing on the shore. "Make a thorough examination. We are going out to water; we shall be back in two and a half hours, and I shall want a full report from you. By the way, we shall sleep there to-night; see that it is got ready."

The people had gone out in a great stream to the wells of Turkusha, five miles back in the desert, and tribesmen, who had heard that something was afoot, came hurrying in hundreds to join them. Soon a crowd, many thousand strong, was collected at the wells.

When Cavell had ridden round the town to examine his handiwork, he fell back upon the wells to water his tired animals. As the column approached, Cavell saw that between himself and the wells was a long line of spearmen and riflemen. They did not move as he rode up to them.

"Durell! Major Durell!"

"Sir!"

"Take 'B' company and clear the way!"

"'B' company, dismount!"

Sullenly the men got down and formed a line.

"Advance!"

Cavell, his teeth set, watched. The second's hesitation seemed like a year. Thank God, they were moving at last! Once in action they would warm up and all would be well. "B" company advanced slowly; the natives came on, eddied round the flanks. Durell knew it was now or never.

"Five rounds rapid. Commence!"

Not a shot was fired. The men stood sullenly. The tribesmen and the townspeople still came on. Cavell galloped to the centre of the line, leaped off his horse and fell upon the men. The tall, khaki figure lashed amongst the still ranks with a demon's energy. Gone was the quiet voice, the dignity, the disdain; gone too was any fear for his life. He was fighting for his reputation. The machine—his perfect machine—had broken down at the moment of all moments. In another second he would go out, trampled by a mob of savages, with the M.R. looking on. He tried to get to a Lewis gun: he was hustled back; he beat the gunners with his clenched fists, and by sheer violence of will got them to commence fire. In front the crowd hesitated. But the gunners were shooting high. Not a man fell.

"Christ! Oh, Christ! You swine!" Cavell hurled himself upon a gunner, flung him aside, and possessed himself of the gun. The gunner sprang to his feet, seized the barrel of a corporal's rifle, wrested it from his grasp and swung it round so that the butt crashed against Cavell's head and tumbled him across the gun.

Then Durell rose to the occasion. He knew that nothing would make the men fire upon the crowd. How much they would do to save their Colonel was an open question. But he had been ten years with the Rifles, his name with the men was "alalwein" —the fat one—and he knew they would not let him down.

"Form square, you dirty dogs, form square!" The order was obeyed, and a ring of bayonets glittered round Durell and the prostrate Cavell. A couple of Stokes bombs fired by Newsome from the rear fell in the middle of the crowd. Those in front wavered and drew back. Through cracks, suddenly opened in their ranks, the wells could be seen. A company, dismounted, came charging up at the double, and the situation was saved.

. . . . .

In the evening, Cavell sat alone in one of the upper rooms of the D.C.'s house, where he had been brought to rest awhile at the Doctor's suggestion.

The blow had only stunned him for the moment. He had recovered consciousness as they lifted him. On the way home, supported by the faithful Grainger, he had learned exactly what had happened, for all memory of it had escaped him. Now his head and the top of his spine throbbed and ached. He could have borne this pain, though it beat out an almost intolerable rhythm, had it not been for the inner anguish. From the moment when he had seen Durell's anxious face leaning over him and learned all that had happened, his wounded pride had tortured him. It was as if a worm gnawed and turned over and over in the very heart of his being. He could hardly meet the eyes of his officers.

Over and over again he went through those moments at the wells—howit had happened, how it could have been prevented. He remembered the pulse of savage delight he had felt when he saw the people were going to bar his way. He had forgotten all about Rhona and Dane and their letter; he had thought only that his moment of justification and success had come. Then, as if he had lived in the dawn of time when some revengeful god stepped in at the climax to ruin the too-fortunate mortal,

failure had come. It was a failure unexpected and undeserved. His thoughts travelled further back. He began to review his last months of work at Hargeisa. Then, with an effort of will, he broke away from these heavy thoughts. There was still something to be done. He sent for Scott and the Doctor.

"Well!" he said, as they stood before him. "I'll hear your report, now."

"We found Blaker's body, sir," said the Doctor.

"In what position?"

"He was sitting at his desk, and he had been transfixed, evidently from the doorway behind, by two big spears. They are on the desk now. One, the first I think, had gone through his shoulder here and pinned him to the desk. I'll show you the stab in the wood. The other had gone diagonally from right to left, piercing both lungs, cutting the aorta and making a long scratch on the edge of the desk."

"Do you think death from the second wound was instantaneous?"

"Almost, but not quite. There had been a big flow of blood from the mouth. With the help of the two clerks we buried the body over there at the far end of the enclosure. They told us that the body of Ali Warsoma, the police-sergeant, was found in the garden, but had been buried."

"Make a written report of this, Doctor."

"I have done so, sir."

"Sir!" Scott spoke. Cavell looked at him. He was white all round his lips. "Here is his pocket-book and some loose papers that were in his pocket."

"You haven't looked at them?"

"No, sir."

"Thank you! That's all."

Cavell, unwilling to think very much about what he had just been told, examined the papers and pocket-book. There were letters from Dane and Chard, unpaid bills from the Indian firm which supplied stores, and a wad of snapshots: Chard, Dane, Sheringham, a few groups in Berbera, and four of Rhona. There was Rhona snapped at the tiller with her hair blowing across her mouth; Rhona serving at tennis, evidently taken unaware; Rhona kneeling in order to pose Blaker's dog for his picture; and Rhona astride a pony, and laughing at a very good joke. Cavell had never seen these pictures. They gave him a strange feeling, coming out of Blaker's pocket-book, as though she had suddenly come into the room, but not to see him. His first thought was: "How pretty she is!" His second; "How

happy she was with Blaker!" With a sudden movement he tore the photographs across and across, and put the pieces in his pocket.

He opened the two loose papers. They were both voucher forms, but only one had been put to its proper use. The other was a letter. The blood rushed to his face as he read:

"I wrote you a letter, Rhona darling, this afternoon, and I have actually sent it off, the only one of them all that you will get. I wonder if I have done right, or was I selfish to worry you?

"Thinking it over, I see that it is bound to make trouble between you and Cavell. But the trouble is there, I think, already. I knew that in Hargeisa. I think I knew it in Berbera. From the moment he arrived you were different, not only to me, which I deserved, but in every way. Several people remarked it. I can't think how you ever came to marry him. There is a whole side of you that he is bound to blight in time. You may laugh at this, but I think even I understand you better than he does. There's something so straight and true about you. A man has only to look at you to see that you *couldn't* do anything wrong. Yet you can play like a child. I never knew anyone who could play like you. Do you remember the hurdle we put up on the shore, and the evening Mrs. Colver caught you tying my dress-tie outside Government House? Thank you, dear, for that ripping time in Berbera.

"About this question of writing, Rhona, I knew you said I was to write to you. I didn't because I knew Cavell was bound to see the letters. You wouldn't have hidden them, you know, and I didn't want to cause you five minutes' trouble. Yet, if I could have written, I should have kept straight. Oh dear! it's clear I shall never be able to post this letter to you. Rhona, are there no men who can suspend judgment upon a love affair—no husband who would not think the worst about a pure love like mine for you? Even Dane lectured me, and Dane is the whitest man I know. He's the only man left in Somaliland who isn't out to make what he can out of the country, barring Durell, perhaps. I don't know about Rankin.

"Rhona, you dear, I hope you'll be happy. . . . I said prayers of a sort this evening. They were all mixed up with you. I am not sure they weren't to you."

The writing ended rather abruptly. Cavell's face twisted with painful anger and, with a sudden action like that with which he had torn the photographs, he crushed the letter and flung it on the floor. But it was difficult to go on being angry with

the terribly murdered Blaker. And it was difficult to be very angry with Rhona, who would never have seen the letter, who had never written to the writer. And it is difficult for a man to be angry who has been stricken, and is stooping under the blow. So Cavell's anger died down, and he was left thinking. At any other moment of his life but this he would violently have repelled from his mind Blaker's letter and all it contained. He tried to do so now, but the old complete assurance had gone at the Tarkusha Wells, and soon strange questions were beating themselves out in time to the throbbing of his head. "Was there not something rather beautiful in the boy's love? Was not her friendship for him a fine thing? Had you any right to take it from him? Had you any right to send him to Zeila? And Rhona—do you really know her? Do you know how to love her? Isn't it true, as the boy says, that you are out for your own hand? And were Chard and Dane so wrong after all? Is there not something to be said for their policy; is there not something to be said—since this afternoon?"

Cavell answered the questions furiously one after another, sank his head upon his hands, cursing himself and ordering back with his will his old sureness and pride. These doubts were the brood of sickness, to be killed by a drug or a night's sleep.

The drone of officers' voices in the other room broke and steps were heard. His orderly brought in a telegram. It was in cipher, and mechanically he unlocked his despatch box and found his cipher book.

"To O.C. Troops, Zeila.

"Telegram from Burao states Derea Waraba raided town at noon to-day. Reported moving towards Berbera with two or three thousand riflemen of the Ogaden and Gadabursi. Both companies must make forced marches to Berbera. Situation very grave as Habr Awwal may join. Have given Dane wide powers to make terms with Habr Awwal and rest of Gadabursi. If necessary, arrangements will be made to escort Mrs. Cavell with police to Jig-Jigga. Reply."

The game was up. He was beaten all ways now. The Somal had defied all calculations. Instead of keeping the Gadabursi and Habr Awwal quiet, Derea had struck at the undefended heart of the Protectorate. Any minute the whole of the two tribes might throw in their lot with him, and all the Government could oppose to them was three companies who

could not be relied upon, under a colonel who had lost his prestige. If "B" company would not fire upon an Aysa crowd, not "A" "B," or "C" would move one step against the Habr Awwal, their own people. Yet if Dane, with his parleying saved the situation, things were no better for him, Cavell. Dane, the diplomat, would emerge in triumph with his prophecies fulfilled, and his policy justified, while all that Cavell would have to his credit would be the engagement at the Tarkusha Wells!

No, by God! He would have more than that! His head suddenly cleared. He was not beaten yet: not by a mutinous company, nor by DereaWaraba, nor by Dane, nor by Blaker, nor by Rhona. He cursed himself for losing his nerve the moment before, cursed the bruised head that was the cause of it. Plans began to run vividly in his mind. He stood up, staring at the white wall. His eyes grew brighter and brighter. Yes—that was the way. The news did not spell disaster; it spelt triumph. He would blot out the memory of Tarkusha, even if he blotted it out with blood.

He took a piece of paper from his pocket and drafted his reply.

"To Governor, Berbera.

"Your telegram No. 10 of to-day. Strongly advise you cancel instructions to Dane. Rifles march at 1 a.m. Arrive Berbera early morning third day. Proceed by car ahead of troops. If possible, kindly arrange two cars meet me beyond Bulhar in case of break-down. Consider situation at Zeila serious, and that in face of new developments Aden must be called upon for reinforcements. Shall report fully personally on arrival, which will be as soon as possible.

From O.C. Troops."

He stood up, head thrown back, thinking. Already the pain in his temples had lessened. That was good, as there was much to be done before he could think of resting.

He picked up the crumpled letter and put it in his pocket; then he called for his orderly. He made enquiries about the Zeila station car, a blistered but workman-like machine, after which he put the telegram into cipher and despatched it.

Then he called the officers together, gave his orders, and explained as much of the situation as was necessary. Every-one of them, as they stood watching him, calculated the change in his bearing since the last time they had seen him. Grainger and Newsome, who had been sick at heart since they had attended

him on the ride back from the wells, responded with joy to the old sure touch. Durell was puzzled. The Doctor groaned.

Cavell paused. Evidently there was something else.

" There is one thing, gentlemen. Some of you saw how 'B' company failed us this afternoon. I don't want you to talk about it. It is a serious matter, and we have got to set to work and root out this evil. But the disaffection is only in one section of one company. If you start talking about it, it will be a much more serious matter. We don't want them panicking in Berbera ; we don't want this spirit to spread to the other companies and to the police. There's less chance of its spreading if you show no hesitation in handling your men, and if you keep your mouths shut. I'm not asking you. This is an order. And now you'd better turn in and get all the rest you can before the march. Durell!" Durell followed the Colonel into the other room.

Cavell gave him some last instructions and some additional information. Durell, when he had finished, turned to go. Cavell called him back. " I hope to God," thought Durell, " that he isn't going to thank me."

For a moment they looked at each other: Durell, the easy-going, stout and shabby; Cavell, brilliant, bitter, command in every line of him, despite the bandage round his head. A hostility beyond all remedy lay between them. Yet, in the silence, to both men the fact seemed to be cried aloud that the one had saved the other's life that afternoon, if only by way of duty.

Cavell spoke, too wise to omit the right word, too ungenerous to say it with the right spirit.

" You did your job well this evening, Major Durell."

" Thank you, sir. Is that all ? "

" Yes. Good-night!"

XXII

RANKIN stood in the middle of the polo-field, deeply considering. A moment before Rhona had thudded past him, riding upon Hais and waving a polo-stick in the air. She had swayed towards him in an intoxication of movement and cried :

" Isn't this Heaven ? "

He had said " Yes." Watching Rhona wheeling a perplexed Hais around a polo-ball which she could not hit out of a rut, he said to himself : " I suppose this is what they call the Seventh Heaven of Delight. I never knew what it meant before."

There had been a touch of the celestial in the way three at least of this little community had been conducting themselves, surrounded, as they were, by a savage storm, hourly threatening. They did not ignore it. They discussed it, prepared for it, and watched it with all the eyes at their command. But none of them could work up any great perturbation about it. It was all a great game, and they were almost sure to win. As Rankin said ; " It is just Africa. It's a little way she has, and probably we shouldn't like her half so much without it."

At the other end of the field, Dane was adjusting the stirrups of Rhona's pony for his own use. Soon he was giving Rhona and the pony a lesson. The peremptory orders floated across to Rankin, with Rhona's laughter, and Rhona's defiance. Now they were cantering up to him.

" It's not a bit of use," said Rhona. " I shall never get that back-handed stroke."

" But you use your back hand at tennis," said Dane, as if he had used the same argument before.

" I tell you that's quite different," said Rhona, slipping off Hais. " Oh, Hais darling, you're a perfect angel ! "

She put her arms round the black pony's neck and laid her cheek against him. Hais submitted for the sake of good manners, but every muscle twitched disapproval. Dane turned away, fidgeted, dismounted.

"Well," said Rankin, upon whom nothing was lost, "I believe we dine with you to-night, Mrs. Cavell."

"That is my privilege, Captain Rankin," said Rhona, with a bow. "Mind you bring a book along with you. Oh, my pony! Thank you!" She mounted. "*Au revoir.*"

Dane caught her up before she crossed the nullah, and they rode in silence for fifty yards. Then their knees touched, and she turned to him and smiled. He did not respond.

"Rhona!" he said. "Something has got to be done. We can't go on like this."

"Why, dear?"

"You know perfectly well."

"You always say I do, but I don't."

"You were too good yesterday, beyond the hill; you called all my spirit out of me; left me weak as a child. I was frightened when I saw how much you loved me. Until then I hadn't really expected you to love me. I thought that when women said they loved, they only meant that they allowed the man to love them. I did not understand that an exquisite far-away spirit such as yours could love like that with the same great hunger that fills me."

"I didn't know it myself," said Rhona. "Now it has come to me, I see that I have never known love before. A year ago I was a child. It was not in me to love."

"That is why I say that you belong to me, and not to Cavell. It is much more of a sin to go on living a lie——"

"No, no, no!" Rhona shuddered visibly in her saddle. "I won't let you talk like that. I won't listen. You make it impossible for me to be truthful with you; if, because I told you so much yesterday, you take advantage of it like this. I wish I had kept it to myself. Oh, Dane, Dane, I've been so good to you! Must you always be worrying me, frightening me? I was so happy out there on the polo-field. Now it's all gloom and sadness again."

Dane halted at the foot of the slope leading up to her bungalow, and gave a long sigh as he looked at her.

"Oh, you're such a child!" he said, and turned back on his own path.

He was a good half-hour early for dinner, and Rhona was ready in time for him.

"I'm sorry," he said, kissing her hand. "I was a beast to distress you like that. I'm better now, and I won't worry you again. Of course I'm happy. You dear, dear woman! I

ought to shoot myself if I'm not, when you've been so divinely good to me."

"Oh, I'm glad!" she said. "I do so hate it when you're like that. Dane, I've written to Jack to-day."

"Oh!"

"I felt I could not bear to see him, or to go near him just now, so I simply asked him to arrange for me to go straight home as soon as ever it is possible for me to travel to Berbera."

"Thank you." Dane kissed her hand. "You're glorious to-night. You're just glittering with beauty and life. You look as though you had put belladonna in your eyes; they flash so when they catch the lamp-light. Go over there and let me have a look at you."

Rhona went, but in her heart was a little pricking, because Cavell had once used just such words before they were married. Must the first loving, however false, always leave something behind to poison the second? And was it only just over a year ago? And was she not wicked, and Dane, too? No, she was good, and Dane was good, and their love was the most beautiful thing that a man and a woman had ever made between them.

"There's one thing, Rhona," said Dane. "You really must be more discreet. You're positively reckless. I'm a model of decorum beside you. Now, be very careful to-night, for Rankin is quick as a cat."

"What do I do wrong, Dane?"

"You look at me, you speak to me like that, when one of the others is present. It's only for you I'm thinking. Isn't it you, dear, who want to be good?"

When Rankin came they talked politics. Rhona now showed such an intense interest in the affairs of Somaliland that it was natural to the men to talk with her.

"What I can't understand," she said, "is how things can stand still. One would imagine that something must happen, that things would get worse or better. Do you really think that all these days Derea and the Gadabursi and Habr Awwal chiefs are simply sitting and talking?"

"It certainly is very strange, Mrs. Cavell." Dane got the name out without a flicker of an eyelash. "Once the Rifles are united, Derea's chances of a successful raid on his own are fifty per cent less. But then, if he could get the Habr Awwal to join as well as the Gadabursi, he could put up a jolly good show for the Rifles. I doubt the troops could be got to fire upon the Habr Awwal, from whom they are mostly recruited."

"Oh! I see," said Rhona, slowly digesting this information,

while Rankin raised his brows a fraction at what Dane had told the Colonel's wife.

"But you've got into touch with Haji Aden?" he asked.

"Indirectly," Dane replied. "I know where he is. I don't think he personally is out for trouble, but he can't stand indefinitely against Sheikh Abdullah and the younger men."

"You know, Captain Rankin, I don't blame them," said Rhona. "After all, what business have we here? If I were a Somali leader, I'd arrange to have every white throat cut the same night, and go back to the old freedom."

"You'd only bring a thundering big punitive expedition down upon your own people," said Rankin. "And this would become a Crown Colony instead of a Protectorate."

"I suppose so. How remorseless we are? But I suppose it's better for them, when you consider what went on before we came."

"Just as much better as it is for the lion in the Zoo. No more hungry nights roaming the bush; no more nasty, cruel killing of buck and gorging to the dawn; no more dangerous fights with the other wild beasts. Nicely behaved, thoroughly reformed animal, how grateful he ought to be!"

"Rankin!" said Dane. "Have you ever read the history of the slave trade in Africa?"

"No."

"Then read it. I don't care what you pile up on the other side of the scale, atrocities, punitive expeditions, land-grabbing, commercial exploitation. There's enough in that story alone to justify the European in Africa—I don't say the British only—but the European. That means the Congo on the other side of the scale, remember."

"I'm glad," said Rankin, "that you are among the few Englishmen who recognise that other nations have produced philanthropists and sent out explorers and pioneers."

"You're always giving me a jolt," Rhona complained, "when you speak like that. You're always insisting that you're not English. But, after all, you're not a foreigner. You're Irish."

At this Dane laughed, and Rankin smiled. He set to work to explain to her the inexplicable, exactly what it means to be Irish.

"Well," said Rhona, getting up from the table. "Anyhow, you're in the British Service."

"And have I ever failed in my duty, Madam?" Rankin drew himself up as high as he could.

"Oh, don't be silly," said Rhona.

They had no sooner settled themselves upon the veranda than a message came from Cheetham to say that one of the men had hurt his leg. He could not tell whether it was broken. Could Dane come across and have a look?

"Oh, rot!" said Rankin. "I'll patch the beggar up when I go across. I've no knowledge, but heaps of resource."

But Dane rose to go. Rhona went out with him to the gate.

"You did it splendidly, dear," he said. "I shall be back as soon as I can settle the brute. Curse Rankin."

"Why?"

"He gets half an hour alone with you."

As Rhona came back on to the veranda, Rankin spoke out of the shadow:

"So it's Heaven, is it, Mrs. Cavell?" Rhona, not quite knowing how to answer, sat down in silence. "May I congratulate you?"

"Captain Rankin, what do you mean?"

"Oh! I know it's not usual, but then I don't see things in the usual way. And I think you are very much to be congratulated."

Rhona saw it was useless to pretend to misunderstand.

"However did you find out?"

"I hadn't to look very far. I'm sorry to hurt your feelings, but I knew it had to be long before either of you two had the least idea. And I know just when you discovered it. And to-night—oh, you dear fools!—would any people who weren't in love ignore each other with such complete serenity?"

"It's awful—your knowing."

"It isn't awful at all. Don't be silly. Haven't I congratulated you? I wouldn't have congratulated you when everyone else did—forgive me. But I do so now with all my heart."

"Oh, it's easy for you to say that! But think of the misery it causes as well as the happiness. You remember what you said to me at the foot of the hill that evening?"

"Accurately, but I said so much."

"You said you thought everyone was born facing in a certain direction; that from that moment a line was marked for them representing the dominant motive of their life, and only when moving on that line, whether good or bad by the world's standard, were they positive forces at all. And you said that I was an idealist, that I could never be happy, never be real, unless I were walking upon the mountain-tops, or trying to walk there. I don't know if it's true. At any rate, it helped me to do right

then about Blaker. Now you seem to have forgotten. Do you talk like that just for fun; is it all just a clever game with ideas? If so, it's not fair. You knew that I believed you."

"My dear," said Rankin, "I knew you believed me. You were quite right to do so. It's only that you misunderstand me. Why, it's right for you to love our Hakim Sahib; it's the best thing you ever did in your life. If ever you two climbed a high hill, it was to meet each other. The only wrong you can do now is to turn back. You're on your line; follow it through to the end."

"Do you really know what you're saying, and all that it means?" she asked, her voice shaking.

"Yes, all; more than you do, yourself."

"You must be wrong. You must be wrong. No one else would give me such advice. Why should you be right? And how can you understand what it means to be a woman? Sometimes I can't bear the strain of it, and I wish we could all have our throats cut in the night, and never wake up."

"Thank you. *Almost* anything to oblige a lady; but one must draw the line somewhere. Now, as this is an extremely difficult subject, and as I may make a false step, I propose we discuss the handicaps for the Hargeisa Open Singles Tennis Tournament to-morrow."

Rhona laughed, wondered what power had decided that it was Dane she should love when Rankin was so attractive, and discussed the question he had raised. They discussed for half an hour, yet Dane had not returned. Rankin rose, and gracefully took his leave. It was strange that he did not meet Dane on his way back, for they crossed. It can hardly have been by accident, for Rankin was like Cavell in one thing: nothing very much happened to him by accident.

"Where's Rankin?" said Dane, coming up the steps.

"He's gone. Didn't you meet him?"

"No. It's funny."

"You've been a long time."

"Yes. The poor beggar's leg was in an awful mess. Crushed by a camel. And Cheetham's about as much good as a sick hen. Rhona," he stepped into the circle of lamplight, "may I stay for a minute?"

He stood there so humbly—this sun-hardened, tawny man who was almost a stranger to her and yet her lover. She felt a great impulse of generosity. She wanted to do something for him, give something to him. Life had held little graciousness

for him, and she could give him all he wanted and many sweet gifts of which he had never dreamed.

"May I stay a minute, Rhona?"

"Why?"

"I want to ask you something. I want you to promise me that you will not thrust out of your mind all thought of your ever coming to me. I want you to consider it rationally. At present you've got a sort of horror about it. You daren't even think about it. It isn't a great deal to ask that you should treat it as a serious proposition."

"Dane, I'm so worried. Can't you see how hard you make it for me?"

"My dear!"

He put his arms round her and drew her gently against him. Her body surrendered to the ecstacy of this first embrace. But she still fought him with her mind.

"No, no. You know it isn't right. Let me go. Please let me go. Dane, please, please." Her voice trailed off as if she were going to sleep. Then she roused. "Listen! If you'll go now, I will promise to think over what you said. Only do go."

He relaxed her, looked at her sadly, and kissed both her hands.

"Good-night, Madonna!"

She remained standing on the veranda, in amazement to learn of what strange stuff she was made. She looked up at the stars, all in order on their far course. Yet a moment before, when Dane's arms had met about her, they had all stooped, singing round her head and made a crown for her. What had given this one man power to work a miracle? And what strength was she to find on earth against a thing so strong?

An hour or more later, Dane was sitting upon his bed, thinking hard. He had not attempted to turn in. He was not thinking of Rhona. His sergeant, Jama, had just been in with a rumour that drove out all other thoughts. If it could be verified it demanded immediate action. He went out and stood on the edge of the veranda. Away to the left the police sentry challenged and was answered. Dane turned his eyes towards the darkness there, waiting for the figure to shape itself. It was the Indian clerk from the wireless station; for several days Dane had ordered a man to stand by all night.

He took the telegram into his bedroom to read it by the lamp. It was from the Governor.

"DANE, HARGEISA.

"Derea Waraba made lightning raid on Burao to-day, destroying the native town and driving off the police. Bouldon safe in fort with police, but too weak to frustrate Derea Waraba, whose forces now number between two and three thousand, including some sections of the Gadabursi. He is reported moving towards Berbera, which is undefended until 'A' and 'B' companies arrive from Zeila. General unrest throughout country and situation most serious. I must call on 'C' company and rely on you to keep Habr Awwal in hand at all costs. Handling of local situation left entirely to you. I consider it important that you should get into touch with responsible Gadabursi leaders, as some sections have joined Derea Waraba. I clearly recognise difficulty you will have in reporting negotiations after you have left your station. I therefore assure you that any promise you feel called upon to make to the natives in dealing with the serious situation which has arisen will be duly honoured by me. Arrangements for Mrs. Cavell completely in your hands.

GOVERNOR, BERBERA."

Dane read the telegram through twice. Then he went outside. The clerk had another telegram in his hand.

"For Captain Rankin?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Come over with me."

There was no light in Cheetham's tent, but Rankin was sitting up with a novel and alert at the sound of their coming.

"Telegram," said Dane. "Here's the cipher."

Rankin glanced at him and stooped over the paper. After a minute of silence he handed it back. Dane studied it. It contained the same information with a different order. "Proceed without delay to Berbera, via Burao. Approaching Burao keep a sharp look out in case he alters his plans and tries to swing back. Wire immediately when you will be able to march."

"We've got some news now with a vengeance," said Rankin. "What do you make of it?"

"Of the news or the telegram?"

"Of the news."

"That Derea has a head. He couldn't waste any more time arguing with the chiefs of the two tribes so he picked up what Gadabursi he could get hold of, made a wide detour round Hargeisa to avoid us and ensure secrecy, and set out to show the lagging tribes what he could do. And he'll do very well, I

think, and swell his numbers all along the march. I guess after he looted Burao, a lot of the Dolbahanta joined up. It's a good move, and the Habr Awwal will have to join, unless they want Hargeisa and the other places treated like Burao. There's only one thing, Rankin. I wonder if he has the guts to push through right away to Berbera. Because, if so, he'll get there before the Rifles can come from Zeila, and——" He broke off with a gesture.

"Good God!" muttered Rankin. "Berbera couldn't put up any show at all."

"They'd get away all right, I expect. But the whole country would be in a blaze. I doubt Derea, however. He won't have the discipline to keep up the necessary speed. Listen to this." He read out his own telegram. "What do you make of it?"

"Panic."

"That's it. H.E. was having a bad moment when he wrote that. Rankin, do you understand? He's hauled down the flag. If Cavell had been in Berbera, he never would have sent that telegram."

"But Cavell's on the way."

"Oh, I know. And I know what will happen, almost as if I were watching it. But we haven't time to talk about it now. You've got to wake Cheetham and get off. Can you do it in three hours—two and a half?"

"Two," said Rankin. We've been ready for five days to the last spare girth."

Dane went across to make some arrangements of his own, but was soon back again, helping the Adjutant. There were scraps of advice between jobs, which Rankin accepted with a knowledge of their value. Once he said:

"What about Mrs. Cavell?"

"I shall have to get her across the border on to Jig-Jigga and Harrar somehow. I am going to wire the Consul for Harrar to make arrangements. I'm going across there now to get her up." He held out his hand. "Good luck, Rankin!"

"The same to you." They gripped hands. The sudden parting showed them that they were friends. "And many thanks. By the way, Major, *I know.*"

"Do you, you beggar?" Dane flushed, but met his gaze steadily.

"Yes, and I'm glad. So long!"

A few minutes later Dane, having with much stratagem arranged an awakening that would not shock Rhona, was talking to her by the light of a single candle. Rhona was almost as

much perturbed at being discovered in night attire, tousled and sleepy, as at the news. But he did not seem to notice it at all.

"You cannot go through to Berbera with Derea on the loose with three thousand rifles anywhere between here and there. You cannot stay here alone. You must somehow be got over the frontier into Abyssinia and met there. I want you to dress and pack up what you want immediately. Take everything of real value that you can get into a small compass. But we have not more than two or three hours, and we don't want to be overburdened. Get ready for a few days' hard riding."

The way Dane handed out his orders made Rhona feel small and impersonal. She dared not say a word or make a movement to remind him that she was Rhona and his lover.

"But, please, whom am I going with?"

"I can't tell you. You will start out with me. It all depends upon the situation, which is not very clear yet. What I want to do is to hand you over to an escort of police. You need have no fear. I can pick a perfectly trustworthy lot. You are absolutely safe, if you keep your head and do what I tell you."

"I'll try."

"Then be quick. Your business is to dress and to pack. I'll make all arrangements about servants and animals. I shall be back for you in about an hour and a half."

"But Dane——" He was striding out, and lost immediately in the darkness of a very dark night. She did not even know what time it was. She might have been asleep five minutes for all she knew. She had a sense of grievance rather than fear. In a land like this, when the crisis came, there was a majestic and iron quality about men and events amongst which a woman was much like a butterfly that has drifted into an engine-room. Burdened by a sense of the indignity of her sex, she set to work to obey orders.

Long before dawn and invisible in the darkness, 'C' company went thudding and grunting north, up the hills, while south went a small train which filed quietly on a straight track, crossing and re-crossing the nullah. Rhona was riding Hais. She thought it rather ridiculous to ride in the pitch darkness, but she supposed Hais and his master knew their business and left it to them. She was merely part of the baggage, and as such kept silence and rocked her will to sleep as she rode.

Then the stars began to falter in the darkness that was not quite dark above the horizon. The bush which had been black became the coldest of cold colours. It was really no colour

at all but a pallor, and in it the trees separated themselves, stood out one from the other in chill sequence. At last she could make out the men she had heard so long, just ahead of her, mules and a tall camel. They began to speak softly and to look about them. Rhona could not have spoken if she had tried. She could only have whispered, so spectral was this moment before the dawn. She caught her breath. She felt like a child when some familiar friend dresses as a ghost to frighten her and stands silent, hooded and sheeted. This was not Somaliland, this unshining and unshadowed land as still as if it would not move lest it should break the glimmer of dew ; as still as if it dared not breathe lest the sun should find it. The moment is as transitory as the twilight, yet to Rhona it had the feeling of eternity. Then she saw a rim on the drear horizon, and the first colour flowed like a narrow stream in the east ; it was pale and stainless green. Then the wild rose came and passed up the sky, shrinking from the reds which followed. As quickly as if he were walking up the other side of the world the sun appeared. Spear after spear of light sprang into position as the great sphere, still smoky as a furnace glow, heaved over the hills. A man in front broke for a second into a monotonous Somali chant, and then stopped. The spell of silence was lifted from Rhona. She felt she could breathe more loudly and speak, if need be. Faintly pencilled shadows began to slant away from the trees, and the colours came, green and grey and brown, but drowsily as if still half awake.

She made out Dane riding at the head of the little column. When the sun no longer gazed levelly into her eyes she put on her helmet, which she had strapped upon her belt. Sometimes, but seldom, Dane slowed them down into a walk : here and there where the track was good, he broke into the easy canter of the Somali pony, and Hais lifted her like a wave ; most of the time they kept up a smart trot. Six, seven, eight o'clock passed.

She kept looking at her watch. The riding in the dark had seemed interminable, but now it might have been in another existence, so different was the world of light, and so much more interminable the hours since dawn.

They had left the nullah and were in country that, though of the same kind, was unknown to Rhona, when at last she heard Dane's voice in a word of command. Besides the track was a shelter of branches. Two riding camels stood beyond, and by a wood fire, Dane's cook was stooping, while Rhona's boy presided over a camp-table laid for breakfast.

As soon as Rhona sat down with Dane to breakfast, in the

slight privacy of the shelter, she guessed that his aloofness had been deliberate.

"Eat a good breakfast," he said; you'll need it. We've got away in marvellous fashion, and it has been a very hard ride for you. Rhona, I'm sorry I haven't ridden with you or spoken to you. I don't suppose you have any notion of what it means to me to be riding into the blue like this with you. I can't explain. I couldn't ride with you or talk with you. I had to shut out the sight of you, get away and think things out. Dear one, are you tired? If not, I want you to listen very carefully to me.

"Rhona, I thought at first I would decide everything over your head and do what I thought best for you. I am not going to do that. There is an alternative, and you have a right to decide for yourself. I love your mind, Rhona, and respect you as well as love you.

"This is how things are. We are a day's journey from the frontier and also a day's journey from the place where the Gadabursi and Habr Awwal chiefs are collected. Here you and I should part. But now I face it, I cannot trust you to the hands of a few Somali police. I feel that I must go with you. That means two days before I can get into touch with the chiefs, and two days may mean disaster and bloodshed of the most terrible kind, and an end of me in this service, which is not so important. There is another thing. The tribes are wavering. Our prestige, our very existence is in the balance. They have no news from the north yet, but they will expect me to have. They will watch for every indication, and a hair may turn the scale for caution or for the plunge, for peace or war. It is in my hands to save this country or to lose it by the way in which you and I act this coming day. The Governor has lost his nerve. His great moment has come and he has shrunk from it. He has given me a free hand, and if I can rise to the occasion—well, I rather think the star of Chard will be in the ascendancy again. You understand all that that means—completely?"

"Yes. Go on and tell me what it is you want me to do."

"Rhona!" Dane forgot all about his breakfast and leant over the table, his chin on his fists, his clear eyes, empty of passion, shining into hers. "Supposing the assembled chiefs at Jafa Uri saw the D.C. within twenty-four instead of within forty-eight hours, and suppose the Colonel's wife, instead of being rushed over the border in panic trotted in beside him, and supposing, instead of an escort of twenty-five police, they had five and a couple or so of servants——"

"Oh, Dane!" whispered Rhona, drawing back, her own eyes alight from his.

"Don't say anything." Dane laid a warning hand across the little table. "I haven't finished, and you haven't begun to think. It means a fight, and possibly my last fight, for all I hold dear, for a policy of justice and restraint, for an end of this quasi-military rule, for peace instead of war. If I fail, I shall give a hand to Page to down me. If I should succeed, he'll have all the more reason to wreck me. For it will be clean against his interests and those of your husband, and he may try and disown what I have done when the crisis is over."

"What they do is upon their own heads," said Rhona. "You can only do what you believe to be your duty. You cannot sin against the light."

"Then there's the danger. If I could get outside myself, Rhona, I should say it was criminal madness to take a white woman, unprotected, into the heart of a tribe on the eve of insurrection. But I can't get outside myself. I suppose we officials should never get murdered if we ever seriously expected it. As far as I am concerned now, the only excuse—and it's no excuse to anyone else—for me, in asking you to come, is a sublime assurance that nothing will happen to us, that nothing can happen to us." He fell into silence, forbidding her by a gesture to break it. His face rigid with thought, he sat staring at a series of figures he sketched with a fork upon the canvas of the table. At last he looked up. "That isn't all, Rhona. There's ourselves. I want to be honest. I want you to understand me. I want to try and understand myself. If you come with me, dear woman, God knows what will happen to us. We're human, and no man in the world ever wanted a woman more than I want you. And yet, I swear, it isn't for that—it isn't for that alone that I ask you to come with me. In my own kind of way I do try to serve a cause. I'm not much good at talking, but I want to try to tell you, and I believe before Heaven that I am honest in what I am going to say. I believe in the Empire, Rhona. It's been a kind of faith with me ever since I was a boy. You hear it said on all sides that this talk about our holding power in trust for the native people is all humbug. That sort of talk doesn't help. It's humbug if we make it so. But every bit of honest work done all the world over in fulfilment of our trust justifies our country and redeems civilisation. I can see no more worth in the men who would evade responsibilities, drop the half rescued-native back in the mud to keep their own fingers clean, than in the men who take

power for their own small ends, blacken the imperial service and destroy the confidence of the dark people in their charge. I can see some worth in a policy that recognises that we have power, and however chequered may be the past that gave it us, has courage that wills to use it aright for the future. What would we think of a man who shrank from any action lest he might do wrong? You can't have a nation behaving like a monk, can you? You and I are English; you come from the very heart of the old Wessex. I love England. I've knocked about the world; I've heard foreigners jeer at her, and I've seen her betrayed by her own people. I've got a kind of jealousy for her, stronger than ever now I see that she can breed a woman like you. I am telling you now what I have hardly told myself. I do not think a man could put such things into words except to the woman he loves, and no one but she could fully understand."

He stopped. Rhona had been almost mesmerised by his eyes which held her all the time he spoke. Forgetting for a moment to love him, she saw in him a spiritual force and reverenced. She condemned herself for all the criticisms she had made of him, and she despised the others who had fastened upon the small things that, being small themselves, were the only ones they could see. She believed now that there was greatness in him, that indefinable quality in men who, through loneliness, failure, misunderstanding and all the daily down-pull of their world, remain in service to the high and true idea to which they have once given their allegiance.

So, while Dane interviewed the headman from the neighbouring village and made careful selections amongst the police, Rhona sat by the little camp-table, trying to do the hardest thing in the world—to think consecutively upon one point for half an hour upon end. How can one think when the whole body from feet to brow is full of one emotion, like a brazier in which a confined flame beats and beats? It was unbearable to love like this; her humanity was not strong enough to contain this force. She must think; she must think, not as to whether she should ride with him, but how she could save his honour and her own.

When at last he came back to her, there was a far-away look upon her face as though she had journeyed through strange but beautiful places since he had left her. There was something about her that checked him from touching her hand, though it lay limp upon the table and appealed to him.

"Dane!" she said, turning to him, her eyes wide open and

rather sad. "Of course I shall come with you. There can be no question about that. It's an elementary duty. Now that I love you it is just a matter of course that this country has got to be served with the best we have in us. And the other thing is that though I can never belong to you, I will not wrong our love. I shall tell my husband the truth, and though he will never release me, he will not make me live with him." Her voice broke and the hand on the table groped for his. His eyes full of tears, he took it in both of his with one long grip and released it.

"There are two promises, beloved, but I want to make one condition. Haven't I a right to make a condition—however hard?" He nodded. "Then it is that upon this journey, you and I are comrades-in-arms. Oh, my dear, you understand? You must send me back to my husband as I am now, so that, with all my strength and pride, I can tell him the truth. Dane, I am so keyed up and exalted. Am I wrong in thinking that you and I are rather splendid people, or have it in us to be so? Let us do this splendid thing together—give me your word."

"And if I say that this is not a thing about which promises can be made?"

"I can't refuse to come with you," she answered, with a touch of bitterness, "because the interests of Somaliland are more important even than my virtue."

"Don't you see that whatever we do——"

"Don't say it," said Rhona, in a low voice full of anger. "I tell you that if I can go to him with the truth, I can make him believe it. Oh, Dane, can you be so good and yet not see what is right in this? Can you love me so well and not love me still better?"

"I couldn't love you better. But I cannot be at one with you in this. I can see no wrong, only an infinite beauty, in what seems wrong to you."

"But I want you to make a wonderful success of this thing, a clean and splendid service. You must think of your work, not of loving me all the time."

Dane stood up, with a laugh.

"Oh, you child!" She understood the look, and in a minute she was beside him, gripping his hands, drawing him closer to her.

"You think that I don't love you enough. I saw the doubt in your eyes. You think that I'm frightened, that I'm playing for time, playing for safety. Don't dare think that. Do you know it's been a lifetime to me since last night—a lifetime of

desolation because you were riding there and not with me; because you wouldn't look at me or touch me, or speak to me. I felt what it would be like not to be loved by you. It was as though the sun had gone out for ever." She shuddered. "I shall never forget that awful dawn as long as I live. I could have sobbed in my saddle with misery. Dane, I can't live without you! I worship you!" She crushed her lips against his hard hands again and again. "My love for you is just like a great two-edged sword piercing right through my body. For ten days I've loved you; for ten days I've been alive. Never look at me like that again or I——" She covered her face with her hands.

Dane drew them down gently. The far-away look was in his eyes now. Caught in the same current of emotion as that which had swept her to the heights, he kissed her upon the brow, and, against his reason, against his nature, whispered:

"Since you wish it—I promise."

XXIII

It was nearly midnight when Cavell reached Berbera. He made a striking entry upon the Governor, who was sitting in his office. The effect was not premeditated. If Cavell was theatrical, it was in more subtle ways than this. And he was not out for effect. The long-suffering expression that he had had the hell of a day was not far out of place. He had sat for twenty hours in the Zeila car while it rattled like a tool-box and grew as hot as a baking-tin. He came in to the Governor just as he was, with the fine sand in every fold of his tunic and in every line on his face, his cheeks scorched with the sun and his eyes staring out of red rims and dusty lashes as if they had been touched up for the stage.

The Governor sprang to his feet.

"Well done, Cavell! You've broken the record."

"I shouldn't be surprised, sir," he replied, looking much harder at the Governor than the Governor looked at him.

"What about a drink and a bath first?"

"I'll have a drink, and a stiff one, but, if you don't mind, I'd rather talk right away now. What's the latest news?"

"From Sheikh!" The Governor threw this over his shoulder as he filled the glass. "Telegram from the clerk to say that an advance party was approaching from Burao, after which he legged it as hard as he could for Berbera."

"Umm! Getting close," said the soldier. "And Rhona!" he thought. "Is there any news of her? What are they doing with her along the frontier?" But he did not ask. The Governor wondered, but he, too, said nothing. Cavell went on. "I shan't think so much of Derea if he plays about at Sheikh. He can't do much there except smash furniture. And I suppose those lights in the harbour mean that you've got the steamer standing by, so there's no question of a scrimmage."

"No, if there's any comfort in that."

Cavell looked at him sharply.

"You got my telegram, sir?"

"Yes," said the Governor, and paused. The affirmative had contained no agreement. "And——" he paused again, and looked straight at Cavell. (But had he found it quite easy to do so?) "And I have not acted upon the line you suggest." Again there was silence, and then, as if it had been filled by Cavell with remonstrance, the Governor went on: "We've got to face facts, Cavell. The situation is very serious. Here's Derea at Sheikh, and we've got to sit like sheep in a pen, wondering when he'll come down the escarpment to finish us off. You say things are bad at Zeila—more of that in a moment. The worst thing of all is that the Habr Awwal are sitting on the fence. If they join in, every Somal from Hargeisa to Las Khorai and from Las Khorai to Zeila will be out for what he can get, and every white throat out of Berbera will be cut. By Jove, Cavell, I'm sorry! I didn't mean——"

"My wife, sir. It's all right; I hadn't forgotten."

"I've no definite news, but I rather guess she'll be safe and sound in Jig-Jigga by now. Do you understand? *The Habr Awwal must be kept out.* Events have been too quick for us, Cavell. The game's in Dane's hands now. I had to put it there."

Cavell took stock of his chief. He saw the signs of strain about his eyes. He felt just like a doctor who has missed the critical moment and arrived just too late to revive the patient. Were there no heroic measures that might be tried? They had planned for the big moment, and, when it had come, it had been too big for this man. Since the preceding afternoon, he was able to guess what the Governor had been through, but he felt no sympathy, for he had mastered the bad hour, and what one man could do, another man could. He felt again, as at Zeila, that he was the sport of some god, who, having spoiled him with success, had tired of that game and begun another. He had not reckoned upon finding the Governor in the camp of the enemy—his wife, his company, now his partner. His partner—rather his tool. Was there reason to hide this any longer? The Governor was beaten. Was he so beaten as not to resent being mastered? Perhaps he needed it, longed for it, and Cavell was in the mood for a short cut. What little respect he had for Page was gone. The long mask of a face had baffled him a little. Now he read weakness in every line and reckoned up the obstinacy which would defend the weakness.

"Have you thought," the Governor was saying, for he did not like Cavell's staring eyes upon him, "how action such as

you suggested might affect your wife's position, supposing Dane had not managed to get her over the border ? "

" Perfectly, sir," replied Cavell coldly. " And I should not allow it to influence me." Indeed, what happened to Rhona or himself was not of much importance if he failed, and Dane succeeded. Rhona had to be won back, and he would win her, but only if he met her again as victor. And Dane should be made ignominious, and whatever influence he had with her should be destroyed. The long, long score was going to be settled once and for all, and the last items upon it were the hours during which he and Rhona had been alone in the bush with her life in his hands.

The Governor was speaking again.

" If there had been another course, I would have taken it. If I read your telegram aright, what you want is an expedition. Of course you do. But, then, no one outside my position can understand how impracticable that suggestion is. The crisis has been too sudden, we can't afford to wait. You know perfectly well that what I want more than anything else is a chance of straightening up this country, but now is not the time to gamble. If we can keep the tribes in hand for a few days and collect the Rifles together, it's all we can hope for, for the moment."

" It's the one thing you can't hope for."

" What do you mean ? "

Then, carefully, in words already chosen as he came along the coast, Cavell told him what had happened thirty hours before at the wells behind Zeila, and the Governor learned that the corps was a flawed weapon in their hands. He knew, and this was worse, that before very long every Somal in the country would learn it. But it was not disaster, but responsibility, that was most to be feared. If this were bad for the Governor, it was worse for the Colonel. Cavell thought he caught a look in his eye that never yet in his career had been turned upon him. The Governor had mistaken his man if he thought he could dissociate himself from him now, drive him into the wilderness to endure the doom of the cold official gods at Whitehall, who knew no mercy, who must have their victim. Now that Cavell saw the whole of the danger which faced him, his brain cleared completely. His suddenly-born hatred for the man before him fell into its place, a controlled motive power, and he felt every faculty respond to the demand of the coming hour.

" As O.C. Troops, I think it is necessary that I should speak very frankly, sir."

" Of course ; that is what I want, Cavell."

"I can see that the luck has been against you in the way events have turned out in the last forty-eight hours. The responsibility for any failure on the part of the Rifles—for, so far, though serious as an indication, what has happened is not in itself very important—will, of course, rest upon me. But a disaster causes many questions to be asked which will go outside the matter of discipline in the Rifles. There is the question of Blaker's death for one, sir." Cavell jerked his head up, caught and held the other's eyes. "It has turned out an unfortunate business sending Blaker to Zeila." That was a good stroke. The Governor could not claim to share responsibility for that with a soldier. But there was a better stroke coming. "Blaker wrote one or two letters before he was killed. I cannot speak very plainly here, but I *know* that he did write, though not to me. And I think it very probable that he explained something of what caused his murder. I have grave suspicions that an official—I mention no names—has made an extraordinary use of one such letter, and that we may hear of it again."

"Really, Cavell! I confess I find it difficult to understand you."

Did he find it so difficult, thought Cavell, or had two of Blaker's three letters been converted into ashes?

"I'm sorry I can't be more explicit. As I am not very sure of my ground, I had better leave that alone. You will at least understand that the military situation is even more serious than you think. What 'C' company will do, I do not know. My knowledge of Rankin makes me think he will do all he can to have a smack at Derea, and that may mean an end of 'C' company. 'A' and 'B' were both tired out when they got to Zeila. They could not make much speed here with the best will in the world, and we cannot count on the best will. It looked to me as if there might be rain away back beyond Bulhar. If so, Lokoiya will be almost impassable."

"Is all you can do to sit there and croak?"

"No, sir. I am trying to show you how to retrieve what looks like a desperate situation. You are straining every nerve to prevent a general rising. I think you are wrong. Narrow the conflict down to one between Derea Waraba and the Rifles and, as things stand, you are going to get a disaster, a small-scale disaster, perhaps, but enough to break us both. Widen the conflict to one between Derea plus the tribes, and the Rifles plus reinforcements and you are going to get a big success. And, mark you, there'll be no question of unreliability amongst the Rifles when the other troops get across." He stopped.

The Governor said nothing. Cavell felt that every nerve in the other's body was stretched taut, waiting for him to play upon it. "There's something else, which goes further and goes deeper. In order to achieve this small disaster you are abandoning your whole position, paying away the policy which you believe the only one that will achieve anything in this country. You have, of course, thought out just what use Dane will make of the power you have put into his hands. He will promise away every one of the reforms you have been introducing, and which he has always hated, and he will come back in triumph to tell you that you are bound hand and foot and that, for as long as your term here lasts, the Somal is your master. On the other hand, act upon the lines I suggest and the whole country will be at your mercy, and, for the first time in the history of the administration, the Governor will have a free hand."

"Supposing you are right," said the Governor, and his voice had changed, "how am I to get the Colonial Office to act?"

"Force their hands. It's all a matter of drafting the telegram. Does this—does any—Government want a disaster in British Somaliland upon their record? Put it to the C.O. that this is no question of begging money to cancel an expedition, but an insurance premium against a much more serious loss. Tell them that, unless you get immediate assistance, the whole of this Protectorate will go up in smoke. They know what that means, and the howl in the Press and the questions in the House. It isn't as if anything else were happening to distract attention at home. There's a slump in news, and they're running murders and beauty competitions. I tell you that, if only we have the courage of our convictions, we can get them to pour in troops from Aden, and afterwards we can straighten out this country at such low cost that the Treasury will congratulate itself upon an easy escape, and the C.O. will be delighted to find itself possessed of a peaceful, law-abiding country instead of—what they've got at present—a damned, truculent, insubordinate rabble of clans. Why, the thing's a gift, sir—the old scheme, the reorganisation we've dreamed of so often. Here's the tide that, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. By God, sir can't you see it?"

The Governor did see it. He saw Cavell, too, as he had seen him at Hargeisa, a splendid animal, but vivid, too, with intelligent energy. This was not the man to fling aside. He had been a fool to think it. He would take from Cavell what Cavell offered, and he needed, this arrogant vitality. By an order of his will he made their interest one again, and a complete assurance that

together they would succeed warmed him like a strong drink. All he said, was :

" But what about Dane ? "

" Dane's orders must be cancelled. He will have left the station. But there is never any doubt as to which way the Hakim Sahib has gone, and, if orders are made for several well-mounted runners to follow him up, there need not be much doubt about that." Then something like an inspiration came to Cavell. " Perhaps it hasn't struck you, sir, that we've Dane to thank for the mess we're in now."

" What do you mean ? "

" Why didn't he warn us." Cavell rapped out the words with an edge on his voice as if the Governor were Dane. " Why didn't he warn us that Derea was brewing up for trouble ? It's his job to know. And he leaves us blind while we unmask the heart of the Protectorate." The Governor took that in ; every chance to shift responsibility was like food to a starving man for him. " There's one thing upon which we're gambling, and we've got to gamble. That is, of course, upon the safety of Berbera. But it's just the same, whichever line you take. All we can do is to have a prayer meeting and pray that Derea won't have the guts to march at once upon Berbera. Somehow I don't think he will."

" This will be a great blow to Dane," said the Governor, with a last twinge of discomfort.

" I hope so," said Cavell. " I hope it will be a knock-out blow, and that Dane and disorder will go together. The institution of a respectable administration in this Ireland of the East would break his undisciplined heart." Then he laughed in the Governor's face, as unscrupulous as a boy. " The spoils to the victors ! "

There was another thing he thought about Dane which he did not say. It seemed to him that when the D.C. had to break off his negotiations with the chiefs and rumour of the Government's new move came through to them, it was hardly likely they would present him with a safe conduct through to the north. Poor devil ! A highly unpleasant moment was in store for him. Then would be his chance to test the extent of his influence with the Habr Awwal.

It took the two of them an hour to draw up the telegram. Every word was weighed and it was well into the morning when the Governor leaned back in his chair with a sigh, and said :

" Well, read through again, Cavell."

SECRETARY FOR STATE COLONIES,
LONDON.

"Following upon the murder of Blaker, two companies M.R. proceeded from Hargeisa via Borama to Zeila and took successful disciplinary action against murderers. Taking advantage of absence of troops, Chief Derea Waraba slipped through and destroyed Burao. He now threatens Berbera. Owing to fatigue of animals after long march doubtful if two companies can reach Berbera in time. Hargeisa company trying to get through, but, singlehanded, doubtful if it is strong enough to deal with raiders. Loyalty of tribes round Hargeisa doubtful, and fall of Berbera or any serious disaster would be signal for universal native rising. Regret that, owing to failure of responsible political officer to anticipate Derea Waraba's movements and warn me of what was afoot, I have been caught at great disadvantage and must call on you to arrange immediate reinforcements."

The telegram cancelling Dane's instructions did not take them long, and then Cavell went off to sprawl in the Governor's bath, and afterwards to bed. He closed his eyes and dozed off; stretched out an arm for Rhona and awoke because she was not there. But she soon would be there. He understood her now; he would go to her in triumph, but he would go upon his knees. She would not be able to resist that. Meanwhile, he was staking everything upon this throw, even her life. How could he do that? How could any man play a game with his wife's safety amongst savages? Because he loved her too much; because he did not love her enough—he did not know. He did not care. He was too tired, and it was all going to come out all right. He turned over and fell asleep as contentedly as a tired child.

The Governor did not go to bed. He wandered about his room for the rest of the night, looking at the lights of the steamer in the harbour, looking across the shaab to the wireless station, looking towards the escarpment, looking towards Whitehall.

In the morning, Cavell was dragged from an immeasurable distance back into the urgency of his affairs. The sun was high, and the Governor was standing and talking by his bed. The answer to the telegram had come. Cavell sat up, wide awake, and took it.

"Arranging through War Office that reinforcements be sent by G.O.C., Aden, with whom you should at once get into touch. Serious disaster must be prevented at all costs. Please send

daily cabled reports concerning position ; also, as soon as possible, written report giving full explanations of causes leading up to present critical situation."

"What did I tell you, sir?" cried Cavell, with that ring in his voice like a boy's that the Governor had noticed before. He swung his legs out of the bedclothes and made calculations. "They could be here by Monday, that is, if Aden's been properly gingered up. And 'A' and 'B' couldn't get before Monday at the earliest, and it might be Tuesday, that is, if they have bad swamps at Lokoiya. Meanwhile there's nothing for us to do but amuse the ladies."

All that Saturday, Cavell was the life and soul of Berbera. He paid large tribute to Mrs. Colver, a very old friend of his, and found her whiter and more lustrous-eyed than ever. She clung to him with a terror that was not assumed, but only manipulated, and, when he had soothed her, she recovered herself sufficiently to talk about the dear little wife, measuring out the drops of poison with an accuracy which he could not but admire. When he tried to go, she cut off his retreat, flowing round him in a pale mauve tea-gown which was voluminous without being decent, while mingled perfumes eddied out of her hair and bosom and throat, gust after gust—face powder, scented soap and the varied creams with which she anointed her skin. Cavell had always seen through Mrs. Colver, but she had amused him. Now he was nauseated. He broke away and, standing outside, he drew a deep breath and thought of Rhona. She was crisp and clean to his memory. She was like a wild daffodil by a running stream and the other woman was a camelia, stale after a night in the ballroom.

As O.C. Troops, without any troops at his back, in a little community which was defenceless before the threat from the south, Cavell needed all his assurance to hold up his head. But he managed it and also made it very clear that the last thing he meant to discuss was the perilous position of his wife.

In the evening, while they sat drinking at the Club, the Secretary brought the news that Derea had moved back from Sheikh, and the Doctor and Cavell paid for champagne and there was a hilarious moment, and Forster said it was all due to the rumour of the Colonel's arrival in Berbera, and Cavell went back to Government House, laughing, with a roar of "For he's a jolly good fellow" slung after him across the shaab. But, for all that, he knew that Forster hated him now, for Forster's nerve had given way and he had helped to infect his chief with

panic. Cavell had saved the situation, and Forster, who had made a life-study of men in authority, knew that there was one man they never forgave—him who had shared with them the ignominious moment.

"Not that moving out of Sheikh means anything," Cavell said to the Governor, as they sat down together to dinner. "May be moving out to join up with more tribesmen or to have a go at Rankin. However, if it makes these good folk happy and gives us a bit more time, it's all to the good."

"Oh, quite!" said the Governor vaguely. He had to bear Cavell's mastery but he would not bear his cheerfulness. He turned and cursed the boy for bringing the wrong wine.

Afterwards, he went to the office, and Cavell sat on the veranda with a book. It was not long before the Governor strolled out to him, and Cavell, hearing him coming, smiled out towards the sea. They went back to the office and were soon reviewing and re-reviewing the situation, circling round it with hundreds of words, beaten back again and again in their speculations by the unknown events of the next few days which alone could complete their review.

"We know, at any rate," said Page, and not for the first time, "that my telegram to Dane was received at Hargeisa and the instructions carried out."

"Oh yes! Dane will have got it by now," said Cavell, almost openly humouring him.

It was while they were talking like this that the news came of 'C' company. The Governor read the telegram, and Cavell read his face. As the other sat without making any movement to hand the paper across, Cavell made calculations. It could only be one thing.

"Rankin's got it in the neck," he said. "I hope they put up a good show."

"Too damned good, I should say," Page answered, with one shake of emotion upon the second word.

The news was from the D.C. Buroa. Apparently Derea, with the main force, had never reached Sheikh, which had been gutted by an outflung party of raiders. Rankin had heard that Derea was moving back south of Burao on a line parallel to his own and had side-stepped across the treeless Aurori plain and held him there for as long as 'C' company lasted.

It was evidently the opinion of the D.C. that 'C' company, a motley collection of odds and ends, had put up a magnificent fight. There was not a great deal left of it, and Rankin was shot through the chest. There was no doctor in Burao; Derea wa

hovering still, and, as the way was clear to the north for the moment, Bouldon had decided to use the station car to slip the wounded man through to Berbera. Cavell sat up in his chair, visualising what had happened and going hot and cold by turns. He went hot because he was a soldier and the Rifles were his Rifles and they had put up a good fight. He went cold because he knew that it was the fighting spirit of the Irishman that had swept them into action and some other quality that the Adjutant had and which he did not share. Rankin was spiritually insubordinate, and he hated him. But Rankin had done well and was coming wounded to Berbera. All this did not touch his plans, but it pricked.

"Good for Rankin," he said, as the Governor was evidently waiting for his comment. "And good for 'C' company. Ridiculous odds, but of course he couldn't do anything else. Well, there's your serious disaster, sir. The Habr Awwal will prove you a true prophet now by taking the plunge as soon as they get this news, if there's any comfort in that."

There was comfort in it, as they both knew. There were no complications about the disaster of 'C' company. Under an officer of spirit it was inevitable. Rankin had kept Derea bothered for a whole day, and the odds were that the raider would now fall back to link up with the Habr Awwal.

It was Saturday night. On Monday afternoon, Aden had promised the troops. Cavell's prick was a small matter beside this satisfactory time-table.

"Moreover," he said aloud, though he had meant to say it to himself, "I shouldn't be surprised if poor old Rankin doesn't get here at all. I wouldn't care about banging down here in the charge of two or three Somals with a Gras bullet bedded in my thorax."

"We'll send the doctor out with the best car and a Lewis gun to meet him," said the Governor, and gave immediate orders to that effect. "What's worrying me," he went on abruptly, breaking the silence that followed, "is what's happened about your wife. There's no information from Harrar."

"No news is good news," said Cavell, in a cold fury that the Governor should dare discuss the question of Rhona's safety with him. "If Dane hasn't taken advantage of all the time the Habr Awwal——" The words froze on his lips. A frightful spasm of pain shot across his head; it went like a fork of lightning through his brain, and yet it was like ice. He sat with closed eyes and set face, waiting to recover, hardly breathing lest the awful pain should come a second time.

"Why, Cavell, what's the matter?" The Governor half rose, marvelling. Had the man a heart after all? Had he been bluffing, and had the unnatural control failed? Cavell, still rigid, knew what Page was thinking. He forced himself to move and smile.

"Must have got a touch of the sun yesterday," he said, getting up, "or possibly it's neuralgia. It's all right now, but, if you don't mind, sir, I think I'll turn in."

The pain did not return and he would have slept well, he told himself, if that fool Page's words had not begun to take advantage of his drowsy will to distort themselves, to take fantastic shape and dance and stamp about in his mind. Of course nothing had happened to Rhona. It would be altogether too dramatic for the twentieth century, and Rhona, exquisite offspring of an English country house, could never get on to close terms with savagery and death. How dared they suggest it? Rhona was his possession, chosen after years of selection for her beauty and breeding. Did they think that he would endure such an outrage as to lose her, and to lose her in such a way? The thing was impossible. Yet it was not impossible in dreams, and in dreams that were as like nightmares as he had ever known since his childhood.

He reassured his host immensely in the morning by eating a large breakfast and showing no signs of stress. The night-thoughts had been absurd, the morning-thoughts routed them, drove them clear out of the field. He had never felt better or happier in his life. To-morrow the great tribal tide would begin to flow to the coast; to-morrow the troopships would sail out of that jewelled horizon. Soon after the storm would come, the storm that he had planned, the storm that he could ride. Meanwhile there was Sunday and a long day of work in preparation for the welcome guests of the morrow.

A long day it proved for Cavell, and one in which he left Berbera exhausted. The Secretary, deposed from the inner counsel of the Governor, sulked in the office. But he had to work. So had the Assistant Secretary. The D.C. and the P.W.D. man may have had the worst time, but the Commandant of Police, the Treasurer and the Supply and Transport Officer saw rather more of the Colonel than they wanted. Now he was at the court, now in the native town, now in the docks, now drawing lines in the shaab, now making measurements in the open space west of the walls, now back in the Governor's office for a lightning consultation. The Governor, who had expected a complicated day, felt as though he had been presented with

a good genie, who appeared at intervals with a grin to announce that his wish was already fulfilled.

The only man who escaped this purposeful whirlwind was the Doctor, who had gone out to meet Rankin, and, late at night, had not returned. They were not worried about him. Such news as they got from Burao suggested that Derea Waraba was hanging about that neighbourhood, consuming small villages, collecting stock, and, presumably, waiting for the Habr Awwal.

The Doctor came back with his patient in the still, dark hours of the morning. Mrs. Colver, disclaiming all knowledge of nursing, appeared, seemingly to offer more decorative ministrations. There was an armed truce between the Doctor and the lady, and he stood looking at her gloomily, his ponderous form well between her and the room where the patient must be. Presently he turned and went back to the bedroom. Rankin, who looked all hair and eyes, gazed up at him as he broke the news.

"Not on your life," said Rankin with a violence that only extremity could excuse. "Keep her out for the love of Heaven!" his voice trailed off. He gripped the Doctor's tunic and whispered, "Doc, you're a sport; I'm slipping off. I don't know what I'm going to say, and you must stay with me—see!"

The Doctor reflected upon the look in Rankin's eyes and nodded. When Cavell arrived much later in the morning, and made as if to go in to the sick man, the Doctor came out with a gesture that infuriated him.

"Sorry," he said, with the pleasant finality of the man in authority, "but I'm not letting anyone see Rankin. It's a case of hæmo thorax, and I shall have to operate."

"That's pretty bad, isn't it?"

"As bad as can be."

The Colonel stood irresolute. A sudden pang for his adjutant passed through him. But, after all, why go out of one's way to see an unpleasant sight when there was a very pleasant one waiting for him?

"Well, let me know if there is anything I can do."

He flung out into the glaring shaab with a frown upon his face. But, when he reached the top of the small hill that ran down past Government House to the shore, the frown vanished. Half an hour before there had been a double smudge upon the horizon. Now, well below it, two ships were coming across the magnificent emptiness of the gulf.

In the morning, Cavell was up very early. He sat a few minutes in bed, hugging his knees before he got up. He reviewed

the day that had passed and planned the day that was just beginning. All afternoon and evening Berbera had been full of shouting and running and marching, hauling and heaving and beating of hammers. White men had been rare in the morning; now they were thick as flies upon the shore. Late at night, 'A' and 'B' companies had filed up to the west gate, weary to death, with the mud of the Lakoiya swamps baked upon man and beast. Durell, almost tottering where he stood, had reported enough of the march for Cavell to know, in his heart of hearts, that only Durell could have got the dispirited companies through in the time. But that was a small thing to set beside the picture he could see from his balcony—two empty transports rocking gently in the lee of the spit. It was a small thing, too, that he had had another cut of pain in his head the night before. He was determined not to worry about that. He had a superstitious horror of putting himself into the Doctor's hands that some strong men feel, and he felt quite well this morning.

As he dressed, he stood where he could see the tents, sprung up like toadstools in the night, and not unlike them in shape and colour. He thought with grim satisfaction of the mutineers of 'B' company and of their feelings when they rode into a Berbera teeming with white troops. They would suffer not only for their crime but for the moments in which he had had to be afraid of them.

Oh, it was good to be alive this morning! Everything had gone right, even to the discovery that the officer Aden had sent was not senior to himself. He felt happy and he felt good. A glow of good fellowship with all the word was in the eyes looking back from the mirror as he brushed his hair. He felt friendly even towards Dane because he was going to ruin him so completely. And Rhona—why it kept a man alive to have such a game little devil for a wife.

From the camp a bugle sounded. There was a gurgle of joyous laughter in Cavell's throat. It was all so easy. He had his plan of campaign ready in his mind. Every detail was in its place. He felt as if he were just twenty-one, and half of his years rolled off his shoulders, leaving only their assurance and knowledge. Away at the back, in one department of his brain, his thoughts were calculating as to what honour and what kind of promotion he would aim at when it was all over. India again, with Rhona. He was not at his best in Somaliland. Yet he had made it serve his turn.

He hurried downstairs. The door of the Governor's office was ajar, and he paused as he passed it, but no one spoke. He

found his helmet and went to the door. Something made him stop. He turned back to the office and knocked.

"Come in."

But it was a very strange voice.

The Governor was sitting at his desk. The minute Cavell entered he turned away his head. Cavell suddenly began to hear his heart beat in the most sickening way. He did not know what he must expect. Would the Governor's face be like that for Rhona?

"It's from Dane," said the Governor.

Then Cavell saw the telegram on the desk. But though the Governor, it seemed, could say no more for the moment, Cavell could not move across to look for himself. He remained, staring stupidly from the door.

XXIV

As you ride along the Abyssinian frontier, south of Hargeisa, the land lies in long scoops from one escarpment to another. From these low ridges which are like walls, the country traversed seems flat and the track is veiled beneath as flat a layer of tree-tops. Only the escarpment is bare, a pile of brittle stones, and when it is topped just such another forty or fifty miles of thorn-stuck waste stretches to the next ridge. Of life, or the means of life, there is no sign ; it seems a dead land. Yet, beneath that shuttering of thorns, here and there a few natives will be creeping with their dry beasts, leaving no more mark in the wilderness which nourishes them than the oryx and kudu which flicker between the tree trunks.

In this bleak land Europe is forgotten. The track running south-east leads sheer across an unmapped border, through the Southern Haud and the country of the Ogaden, where savagery still keeps its bounds unpierced by the white man. It is not only that there is no visible sign of the West. No European thoughts have been thought here ; no European eyes have measured the view from crest to crest. In the West all Nature has human associations. This little wood by the stream has been a place where lovers have met and children gathered blue-bells ; that waterfall amongst the birches was once the darling of a poet ; even the crag above the moors has been marvelled at and a thousand pilgrims have climbed to its crest for the joy of sharing its eminence and have carved their signs upon its face. But here the land is unlovely and unloved. The air about it is empty of dreams. It lies stark and uncaressed. It grudges each atom of sustenance stripped from it, and has great skill to torture and destroy.

It was a strange thing, therefore, when Dane and Rhona came riding hand in hand through the trees, bringing their great love with them like a third presence. Whether it is that women feel such things most, or whether they are quicker to speak of them it was Rhona who said :

"No people loving as we do ever came into this country before. Don't you feel as though this place does not understand? It seems to me as though it crouched, hating us because of this strange force we have brought, and waiting to destroy it."

They rode a little way from where they had breakfasted and rested long about noon. If they were in the danger-zone, Rhona did not think of it. They might have been at the bottom of the sea, so closely did those sparse trees muffle their view and so little did they see of human life. It seemed to Rhona that they had been riding for ever, had ridden right out of the world into this infinite place of stones and thorns where only their love was real.

They gave themselves up all day to their love. They played with it; showered it upon each other; marvelled at it; took it in their hands and tried to understand it. Did the world know there was such a miracle that man could achieve? The world had given them no hint, if it knew. The world did not know; a love like their's was a treasure, seldom found, and only by rare spirits. If the world had known, that old dim world that they had left behind, how different a place it would have been: a people of lovers such as they would have turned it into a New Jerusalem.

Being so loved was to Rhona like coming out after a long winter to play in the first sunlight. She felt Dane's love about her, warming her, and making golden everything she did. To be so appreciated in each word and each movement was to be given a double measure of life. What Dane thought her she was. She was pure and wise and beautiful. Each turn of her head was a picture for him to keep for ever. She felt her individuality like a song in her breast and like a light swimming in her eyes, a sweet and lovely thing because he worshipped her. He had put a crown upon her head; she was a princess, and she rode beside him in all the gladness and pride of her royalty. Out of her boundless wealth she gave him gifts—a look, a smile, a long pressure of her hand.

At noon, when the sun was unbearable, they rested. Dane had a rough shelter made, and she sat beside him. Presently she drooped over him, and he took her head upon his knees. She slept, and he hardly dared to breathe because of the spirit which had gone away and trusted its beautiful home to his keeping. Her hair touched his bare knees, and he hung over the upturned face, examining it. How was it made? In what lay its beauty? How had the minute silk hairs of the eyebrows grown in such

a perfect line? There was a fraction of difference between them, a slip of the pencil that had marked out their course. A woman's skin was of different texture from a man's. He had never looked so closely at it. Poets spoke of the petals of flowers. It was a pity that they handled and exhausted every sweet simile about a woman's beauty. But they were right; only petals made brightness and shadow out of the softness of their own surface and seemed to have a light shining behind them.

Then, as his eyes followed down her throat to her body, he laughed, and Rhona made a little whimper in her sleep and turned over. She was wearing khaki trousers, and one boyish leg was twisted under the other. Her slender waist was buckled in by a stout leather belt. He felt a rush of tenderness for the child in her which so loved these man's trappings and wore them so bravely. Her silk shirt was rolled up to show sunburnt arms. Right up to and above the elbow they were a dull gold, and when he gently lifted the limp, light forearm he could see the tiny scales of skin the sun had flaked off during the day. He knew that, whatever happened, as long as he lived he would remember this hour when she had allowed him to bear the living weight of her head upon his knees and gaze at his will into her beauty.

In the afternoon he talked about his work. He gave her a view into a very serious mind. He spoke of the Somal.

"I've always had a bit of pull with these people, because, the first time they distinguished themselves fighting in East Africa, I happened to be in command. They hadn't been very popular there before that, and it meant a good deal to them, because they're so infernally vain. Nearly all the old men in my company are back in the bush now, and they always come up and see what they can get out of me for old times' sake."

He went on talking and planning. After a while, Rhona ceased to attend to what he said and attended only to him. How different, she thought, is the furniture of a man's mind from that of a woman. Three-quarters of it was work, all the technical skill he had gathered in long years—military matters, law, mathematics, geography, agriculture. Her mind seemed to contain nothing but principles and personalities. It was serenely empty of all information except such as she had needed in order to understand and answer the few men of her world. That was why her interest in what Dane was saying quickened when he strayed on to the subject of irrigation, because she knew it was close to his heart.

"That chapter's closed," he said. "I shouldn't be in it

all again without the support of the Government, and I'm never likely to get that now. Moreover, I doubt I shall be here much longer."

"*What!*" cried Rhona, gripping his knee with her hand. "Leave Somaliland? Dane, you're not serious?"

"Somaliland is too full of you, Rhona."

He picked up her hand and kissed it as he said this. She did not speak. What he had said filled her mind with questions she had no heart to ask. But Dane would not let her brood. He began again, talking cheerfully, "I want you to provide our supper to-night, so keep your eyes open. I quite understand what you feel about shooting for fun, but shooting for meat is quite different. You've got to have your job, the same as all of us. Besides, it's just as well to show these people that you can shoot. They'll respect you immensely for it."

"All right, Major, I'll show them."

"Just how tired are you, Rhona?"

"It depends how far we still have to go?"

"Half a mile, I think."

"Oh, really!" She laughed at half a mile. "Do you think you could find some reason to order me to jump that old zariba over there?"

"I might, but you couldn't do it."

"Oh ho! couldn't I? But is it fair on Hais?"

"Better ask him."

"Hais!" She hissed in his ear, and pressed her knees into his flanks. Hais tautened up, aquiver with interest to know what she wanted. Away they went, Rhona singing and waving her right arm like a circus rider to show off. Hais went at the withered stockade like a panther, and they made two streaming arches, up and into it and up and out of it, and came drumming back to sweep in a circle round Dane and draw up abruptly, stirrup to stirrup.

"Oh, I do love my body, when it does everything I ask it! I could jump over the world for you. I'm not a scrap tired. I don't believe you can get tired when you're in love."

She thought of her journey with her husband and how tired she had been then, and how hard she had struggled to adapt herself to him. Yet she had thought she loved him. She had loved him. Why was that love so different from this? And what a cold thing was a love that had been killed! Must it always be carried, filling up a corner in her heart, a dead weight that cannot ever be thrown aside? He broke in upon her thoughts.

"This is where we camp, and there are some guinea-fowl over there. Let me see you get some, but don't go out of sight."

Rhona managed to get two of the big, speckled birds and brought them back without a pang.

"Yes, it *is* different," she decided, "when it's us or them; and there are such lots of them."

Their camping-ground was about half a mile off the ghost of a track they had been following. It was nothing but a space like every other space amongst the thorn trees. Rhona sat cross-legged upon her saddle in the sand, while the cook made a fire of sticks and the five policemen set to work to put a girdle of branches round them.

There must have been reason in Dane's choice of site, for soon there were tall Somals talking to him, great long-haired fellows, and everyone holding a gun, tufted at the muzzle with ostrich feathers—a feather for a life. Dane was soon surrounded by them. He took off his helmet and ran his fingers through his sandy hair as he talked. Then he unbuckled his belt, with the revolver-holster upon it and handed it to his boy. A giant with nothing about him but a skirt of dusty calico came and towered behind Dane. He held a huge double-bladed spear. Rhona felt suddenly sick. Of course they would kill him. Why shouldn't they? There was nothing to prevent them. It would be the great brute with the spear who would strike first. She was sitting with her rifle across her knees. She made plans as to what she would do. She saw exactly what was going to happen. In another moment Dane would be a crumpled heap of khaki in that circle of bare legs and she—strong black hands and pitiless eyes. How did one shoot oneself with a rifle? She ought to have practised. She shut her eyes, then gave a great start as a hand touched her shoulder. It was Dane. The hand gripped her harder and he shook his head in reproof, but there was a wealth of kindness and understanding in his eyes.

"This is Didhr Fara, an old sergeant of mine"—and there was the giant bending over her, his face one enormous smile and a huge hand open to swallow hers. The far-swung pendulum rushed right back and Rhona laughed aloud. She went across and was introduced to all the big brown men, smiling and shaking hands as if she were at a Chantrey garden-party.

Soon the baggage-camels threaded into the zariba, and there was heaving and hammering while the tents went up. The fire grew yellower and yellower in the dusk. The camels, tethered in a gaunt row against the afterglow, indulged in the hundred noises of the camel—growled, [illegible]ed, grunted, gobbled, snorted.

Rhona slipped into her tent. She rested herself a moment in the privacy of four walls and then changed. She came out to an indigo world, pricked by a few stars and torn jaggedly by the flames of the fire. In the zariba gap, Dane was speeding the last visitors.

They had dinner by the fire, under the awning of Rhona's tent. Rhona was wearing a creamy little frock with blue borders. She had thrown it in at the last moment because it was a frock that could be rolled into a ball without harm. As she had no mirror, she had brushed her hair back and made a big plain knot over her neck. The plainness showed the distinction of her head. Dane sat in silence, troubled by the transformation. Rhona had changed with the dress. There was a still dignity in her attitude. The mystery and sweetness of womanhood were like a cloud round her and made him feel afraid of her.

She asked him what he had done, and he told her that he had sent runners out to all the head men of the Habr Awwal and Gadabursi, most of whom were gathered together in a place called Jafa Uri not twenty miles away, ordering them to meet him there at noon the next day.

"Will they come?"

"I think they'll come. The crux will be when I meet them. It all depends upon what news they have of Derea. They may know more than I do. Anything may have happened. Derea may be marching upon Berbera, or falling back upon Hargeisa."

"Are you pleased with the way things are going so far?"

"In moderation. We've got these beggars properly puzzled, coming into the middle of them like this. They can't make it out. But there's a very dangerous man with them, a mullah—Sheikh Abdullah. He very nearly got Haji Aden murdered yesterday, they tell me. And Aden has sent me no message and I have not been able to send him one."

"What have you told them?"

"Nothing. I've got them guessing; they only know I have come with a proposition to be put before the chiefs to-morrow. They'll come, if only from curiosity."

"And what is the proposition?"

"Ah! that depends."

"On what?"

"The inspiration of the moment."

"That will be our crisis?"

"Yes."

They spoke to each other across the table, but it was an

immeasurable distance. The night was with them, hanging over them, a dark presence of which to be afraid, an uninvited guest. The savagery of the day was nothing to the savagery of the night. Rhona could feel two pulses throbbing in her ears. She wanted to go, but she did not know what to say, or how to go. The picture of Dane's head, still and set, with the flames making shadows in the hollows of his cheeks, became misty. She was not afraid of Dane but of the night, which might take him and change him, so that he was no longer Dane but the night of Africa, waiting and watching about them.

"I think I'll go to bed now. Good night!"

She had spoken the words, but nothing had happened. She had failed. Dane was sitting just as before, only the terrible thing was happening. He was immobile, yet he was changing. He was all shadows now, his face inhuman and his eyes dark and shining. She, too, sat perfectly still, with a cry she could not utter struggling in her throat. She dared not speak again. Supposing she chose the wrong word and failed to break the spell! Would it last for ever, this staring and stillness? The fire was dying down. The logs fell with little crashes. Soon there were no flames, only a great red glow. That would die and then there would be nothing to hold the night off. It would come round them like curtains, closing them in.

Then Dane moved. He shut his eyes, drew his shoulders up in a kind of shiver, and opened his eyes again. With an effort of will which was visibly great, he smiled at her, leaning across the table.

"You said you wanted to go to bed. Go, dear! You must be tired."

She stood up and, as she passed him, she kissed his hair above the brow, not daring to speak her gratitude. He did not move except to look up and smile at her again in a slow, sad way that told her everything.

Later, when she was in bed, he spoke to her from outside.

"Rhona, you won't mind if I sleep out here in front of your door? I think it's better for me to be here."

"Of course not," she replied.

But, tired as she was, she could not sleep. The night still had power to oppress her. She heard the men; they seemed to talk all night. She heard the hyænas. Long before it was light, she heard the squealing and grunting of the baggage-camels, who were going ahead with water and stores. Though she slept little, she knew that Dane did not sleep at all. Halfway through the night the wind got up, and now and then,

through a slit between the flaps, she could see him, fully dressed and sprawled across a camp-bed, reading by the light of a huge yellow fire.

It is not often that the African sun is welcomed, but Rhona hailed him with joy when he joined them at breakfast, turning from red to yellow, and from yellow to the whitest brass as he got clear of the trees.

She felt that what she had said in jest must be true and that love was like a wine that healed all weariness and strain and was food and drink and sleep and joy to those who drank deeply enough of it. Never had she lived so much in the moment. She was gay because it was morning, and though the day must end with the night, yet the night was twelve hours away, and though at noon they must trust their lives to the chiefs and fighting-men of the Habr Awwal, yet noon was four hours away. Four hours she had to ride away from the edge of civilisation with Dane.

It is beautiful, thought Rhona, to ride with the one you love. The perfect sympathy is communicated to the animals, and they move in unison. Sometimes knee touches knee ; a hand is brushed and caught ; the changing track is seen ahead—reached—passed. Together in adventure, the two go forward.

They were intimate again. It was morning and Rhona came out of the castle she had locked and bolted against him ; she forgot even its shadow as she laughed and played in the sun. "Now we are friends—friends," she thought. "Brother and sister, boy and girl, boy and boy." But the miles passed beneath their feet, and soon the irresponsible hour, in which they had rested themselves, was over. Rhona gave a tremendous sigh.

"And now, please, begin to think about what you are going to say to those chiefs, because we must be getting near the place, and I am beginning to have a funny feeling inside."

To give him a better chance to concentrate, she dropped back and rode thoughtfully in the rear of their little company. She set to work to give herself instructions. The great moment was upon her. For the next hour or so she must be as inconspicuous as possible, and try not to matter even to herself. And she must be fair to Dane. Away at the back of her mind an old inherited instinct was asserting itself, a desire for mastery, and against her own judgment, she had a doubt lest there should not be enough pride and hardness in him. He had come out to buy these people off with concessions, not to hector them. It could not be a very glorious business, but she was not a romantic school-girl, and she ought to know by now that soldiering can be a very sordid affair.

The track widened. They began to pass people, who straggled after them. Away up the track, some horseman turned at the sight of them and galloped off. She knew, without knowing why she knew, that the police were uneasy. She rode level with Dane.

"Dane, don't consider me in anything you do now. Don't play for safety on my account."

"That's all right, Rhona. Your presence will have only one effect upon me. Look, here we are!"

The trees had suddenly drawn aside. The track turned to cross a narrow but deep nullah. A thousand hoofs had dug a steep incline out of the abrupt red cliffs. They rode down and up again to find themselves upon open and bare ground. This slanted gently upwards a few hundred yards to a close clump of *gurgis* and, beyond, the hills led in wide steps to the Abyssinian ranges.

In the foreground, standing or squatting in a half circle, and facing them as they clambered out of the nullah, were the chiefs of the Habr Awwal. They were silent and still in their group, and behind them and along the banks were thousands of spearmen and riflemen. Rhona had never seen so many Somals —did not know the country contained so many. Most of them were squatting, their rifles, gripped in both hands, upright in front of them. The men near the track moved a few feet to let them pass into the open space before the eoders. Rhona did not look behind, but she felt how they closed up. A sense of finality came to her. They were saved one anxiety at least. There was no question of escape.

Rhona could not read the expression of a Somal, but she could feel the massed meaning expressed by hundreds of them. Novel and curious sensations took hold of her body. Her eyes seemed to grow large, her fingers stiff; a ring of ice pressed her head; her throat closed; her mouth became dry, and her spine seemed to grow bristles, and turn slowly round and round. On top of all that she felt ignominious. She was one ridiculous white woman with two or three thousand tribesmen staring at her, who all knew perfectly well that, though she was alive now, she would soon be an even more ridiculous-looking corpse.

"Stay where you are," said Dane, dismounting. As her throat had closed she could not answer. It was a good thing she had not to get down, because her legs would not have borne her. She hoped that she was sitting her pony well by Somali standards.

He was giving instructions to the police about their camp,

pointing up the river-bed ; evidently he assumed that they would need another camp. When Lurgeh offered him his rifle he smiled and shook his head. Tapping his helmet back to the extreme angle that he favoured, he strolled across to the open space towards the chiefs. He did not go up formally to the middle of them. He saw someone he knew at one side and shook hands. He moved slowly from left to right with more hand-shakes. Then he said something which made the men near him smile. Dane's khaki figure looked very small and lonely amongst the huge crowd of natives. It could not be expected that this one speck of humanity should master all these thousands of specks, just because it wore khaki and had a white face. Yet, already, though he had only wandered round the circle for two minutes, there was a change. The natives felt it. Some, who were standing, settled back on their haunches. A drone of talk arose. Rhona felt it. The muscles of her body relaxed of their own accord, and she sank down lower upon her saddle. Then the silence came again, and she saw that Dane was speaking, his voice sounding small amongst the big concourse. He had called Ismael the interpreter to his side, but he did not use him. Rhona did not know until afterwards all that had been said. Like the men behind her, she had to judge by voices and movements.

" Fetch me something to sit down upon," said Dane, and, after a moment in which no one moved, two men from the back brought a pile of brown grass camel-pads. Dane sat down in front of the chiefs. " All you whom I see in front of me, do you speak for the Habr Awwal ? "

They answered, all at once, in deep harsh voices, " Ha ! Ha ! "

" Good. I speak for the Serkal. I am told that you know very well what I have come to say."

" Yes, Dane Sahib, we know." Sheikh Abdullah stood up from the middle of the circle, among murmurs of support. " You have come from the new Burra Sahib with fair words to keep us talking here while he fights with Derea Waraba and our brothers, the Gadabursi." Rhona, who was staring at the graceful mullah, followed his gesture. On the right, somewhat apart. a group of men, heavily armed, stood scowling. Their long hair, parted in the middle, stuck out in two wedges and they wore cloths only about their middles. The Sheikh, adjusting the tassels upon his ear, continued lazily. " This Page has not the heart of a man ; though he is hiding behind walls he is afraid because the Rifles are in the Aysa country. Therefore, oh

Hakim! he sends you to trick us, lest we, who have forgotten, should remember that we are not dogs but men, and should drive the infidel into the sea whence he came."

He looked round with a smile, and several of the chiefs spoke at once, evidently in assent. A shout ran round the circle. Dane dug his heels into the ground and prayed that neither Rhona nor her pony had moved. But the shout failed before it became general. A wizened little man sprang up and spoke in a shrill voice with all the gestures of the demagogue.

"It is true. Do not listen to the Hakim. The white man fights best with words, and the Somal fights best with spears and rifles. Let the fight be with our weapons!"

Several chiefs cried out.

"Give us back our grazing grounds!"

"Here we are! Take our rifles from us now, oh Hakim!"

"Is it our rifles you have come to steal or our women?"

"Have a care! What did the Aysa do with the boy sahib at Zelia?"

Dane waited until the shouting and laughter had died down.

"Jama Fara says you are not talkers, yet it seems you have a great deal to say. It is only noon. I will sit here until the evening and listen to all you have to say."

There was a pause at this. Life being at stake, Dane was as sensitive to the impression he made as a woman coming into a ball-room. Didhr Fara, the old sergeant, had a face he could read, and it was not pleasant reading. In the front row, handsome Haji Aden dropped his eyes. He could hear the irregular breathing of Ismael, just behind him. The whole assembly was empty of support. Groping, he found nothing with which he could build. Like the spider, he must draw upon his own vitals. He felt the limits of his single humanity. But he must make the call upon it and it must answer.

Old Yusuf Ali, Aden's uncle, spoke.

"Is it not true, Dane Sahib, that you have come to ask us to sit still while Derea Waraba marches and that, for sitting still, you will pay us with promises?"

"It is a lie."

They all wanted to hear him now, but Dane stopped short. Haji Aden caught his eye, and several chiefs who had been silent urged the young leader to speak.

"We do not understand you, Dane Sahib," he said. "There are wise men here as well as fools, and they wish to hear what you have to say."

"I did not come here to talk," the D.C. replied. "I came

to see what sickness had befallen the Habr Awwal. Sheikh Abdullah, though he knows so little of fighting himself, tells me you can fight. I look round and I see many hundreds of big men with spears and rifles. Yet for how many days have you sat on the ground here, talking, talking, talking? I think that if the Habr Awwal were going to fight with Derea Waraba, they would be with him now. They would not sit behind the bush like jackals, waiting to see if the lion would kill so that they might gnaw the bones he left behind him. If so, this tribe has changed since the day I first knew it. Well, Sheikh Abdullah?"

The mullah had shed his voluptuous air and spoke passionately.

"Men of the Habr Awwal, he has insulted your tribe. These white infidels are between your hands. Are you going to stand and stare like cattle because this man has a white skin. It is as easy to cut as a black one. And the woman belongs to the Colonel, who thinks Somals are like dogs and can be beaten."

"I have not insulted you," said Dane, "but I have insulted this mullah. Come here, Sheikh Abdullah! I want to speak to you."

The man swaggered up smiling, almost as if he would strike.

It was useless for Dane to rely upon any weapon but his eyes. He held him with them; then spoke the others. "Nothing is more easy for you than to kill me and this woman. We have no weapons and we cannot escape. There is no need for you to hurry: we can well spare a moment to reckon up what you will gain by it." He felt for his pocket-book and his purse. "Here is all I have—sixty rupees. There is also my rifle and my revolver, a few police rifles, five ponies, seven mules, three riding camels, and eight baggage camels." Then, for the first time, he spoke to Rhona, throwing the words over his shoulder. "Walk slowly across to me." She obeyed. "What have you in your pockets? Any money?"

"No. I never brought any." She searched. "I've really nothing but this." She drew out a coloured silk handkerchief and handed it to him.

Dane held out what he had to the mullah before him. "It is not much, but you can divide it amongst yourselves. Or perhaps, since it is hardly worth dividing, and as the Sheikh is so forward in this matter, you will let him keep it all for himself." The mullah stepped back, and some of the chiefs smiled. "This handkerchief would please your second wife if you have not yet found reason to kill her, like the first. I say it is not much, but it is something. Later in a short or a long time, I know not,

it will be all of you who will do the paying. The fine for killing a Hakim is very big, and the Serkal never forgets to collect. It may be in a month or two months, many troops will come from Arabia, and you will pay a great fine in cattle and burned *gurgis* and many lives. Will you reckon up among yourselves while we wait here."

He turned his back upon them and put his hand upon Rhona's pony. Neither of them spoke. Rhona found that she was counting to herself. She had reached a hundred and thirty-five when, as no one took advantage of the opportunity to discuss, Dane turned again.

"We have been talking foolishness," he said. "I did not come here to talk but to fight. I want two thousand riflemen and spearmen to come with me against Derea Waraba, whom we shall cut off from the border and break like this." He picked up a twig and snapped it across his knee.

"Men of the Habr Awwal," Dane's head jerked up and he spoke loudly, "it is time you had some fighting. But it is foolishness to fight against the Serkal and his servants. His servants are but men if they have made mistakes, the Serkal will see that those mistakes are remedied. Now Derea is your enemy, as he is the enemy of the Gadabursi. He has stolen your stock, and many of you are thin this day because Derea's cattle are fat on your grazing.

"Men of the Habr Awwal, I am a soldier, but it is long since I had any fighting. I would fight again and I would fight with Somals, as I did in East Africa, when we stood in a square, a hundred and twenty strong, for five hours, and a thousand Habashi raiders flung at us in vain. There are men here to-day who fought with me in that fight. The Rifles are at Zeila. Let us show them and this new Governor what a Somali tribe can do when it goes out to fight. Let us show them that we do not need the Rifles to protect us from a robber.

"Now, listen carefully to this. Each man who fights with me shall have full pay from the Serkal for every day he fights. You shall have back all the stock you have lost. I shall want a hundred camels for baggage, and a hundred camels for food, and for every one you shall be paid in full. And you shall be here at noon to-morrow. Talk for half an hour among yourselves, and then bring me your answer. And now," he said, dropping into English and turning round to Rhona, "whatever else you do sit still and look pleasant, as the photographer says, while these gentlemen get their bearings, because at the moment they are a little out of breath. I know it's noon and you've been

standing for more than half an hour in the open, but it will all be settled one way or another in a minute now."

Rhona did not understand much, but she understood enough to stop her asking any questions just then, so she showed her teeth with a pretty good smile, put Dane's helmet straight, and said.

"Don't worry about me. I'm all right."

The chiefs were not long conferring. News of Dane's offer had quickly spread through the tribesmen, and a buzz of talk filled the air. Silence fell again as Dane strolled back and sat down.

"Well! Your answer?"

Old Yusuf Ali stood up.

"Hakim Sahib, I speak for the Habr Awwal."

"Ha! Ha! Yusuf Ali speaks for the Habr Awwal."

"Be patient, Sahib. The mouth of the Somal is big and his tongue is long. But to-day we will not talk much. Before you have any answer from us, there are matters that must be settled."

"I know," said Dane.

"Did the Somal ever arm against the Serkal in the days of Chard Sahib? Chard was a man, and he treated us like men. So also did Sheringham Sahib. So have you. But the ways of this Burra Sahib are new and shameful. Did he think, perhaps, when he came here, that we were a conquered people, like the Aulihan and the Marehan in the Juba country, we who are a free people and of our own free-will have accepted the Government of the British? Well we know that the Colonel was ever our enemy. But little harm could he do us in the good days of Chard. But this Page has taken his evil counsel. Ten days back did we not ask that the Rifles might march against Derea? But Cavell laughs to himself and says, "Let Derea harry the Habr Awwal, while I ride north, and lay waste the Aysa and then they will all alike lie flat on the ground, like dogs that have worried each other. There are other things. The Rer Lugeh at Hargeisa have been driven off their grazing ground by the river-bed without warning; the Rifles have been made more and more that they may be used to punish us and not our enemies. It was not so in the days of Chard, Sahib. And we would also know if there is to be any more talk of writing down our rifles in books and stealing them from us. Satisfy us upon these points, Hakim."

"And if I refuse?"

"Not a spear or a rifle will be yours. Dane Sahib, our young

men must blood their spears. We cannot hold them. But we are not fools. What you have said is well said—there will be little gain and much evil if we fight against you; there will be great gain and honour too, if we fight with you. We do not wish to kill you. You are a brave man. You fought like a lion with the men of our race as all our tribe knows. You have never lied to us, and we know that your heart is not with this new Burra Sahib, or the Colonel, who is our enemy. Promise that the Serkal will take away these new orders that are a shame to us, and we will go with you."

"I will not promise. I have been given the power of the great British Serkal, and here and now by this word of my mouth I give you these things.

"The grazing grounds near Hargeisa I give back to the Rer Lugeh section. They shall only be used again by their consent and for full payment.

"The companies are your companies. They shall not be enlarged and shall be used only to keep the peace and terrify the war-makers.

"Your rifles are your rifles. They shall never be taken from you, and, moreover, every rifle you take from Derea Waraba is yours to keep."

"Will you swear this by your God?"

"I am an English officer. My word is my oath."

"It is enough." It was Haji Aden who came forward now, able at last to take his old place between his tribe and his hakim. "You have never yet broken your word. To-morrow at noon, all the men you have asked for and more will come here to your camp." He turned to the tribesmen, "Have I spoken truly?"

The men rose to their feet and in a hoarse chant made their answer.

"Waliah and Biliah and Taliah! By Allah once, and twice and thrice, you have spoken with the tongue of the Habr Awwal."

"It is good," said Dane, standing up to bring the conference to an end. "Meet me here at this hour to-morrow. Go! Send out your runners and prepare!"

XXV

A QUARTER of a mile away from the meeting-place the banks of the river-bed rise to a great height. Here, where some trees knot the crumbling red earth together with their roots, the police had pitched the camp. Rhona found everything ready; even her camp-bed was made up as if there never had been a doubt as to whether she would ever need a bed again. Perhaps there never had been. Nothing shrinks more than a danger safely passed.

Obeying Dane's instructions, Rhona had her lunch without waiting for him, and, exchanging her hot shirt and trousers for a silk petticoat, lay down upon her bed, and tried to rest.

She could not rest. Mind and body refused to accept it. She did not feel at all tired; she was only bored by the sudden lull. She knew that in after life she would tell the story of the meeting with the chiefs, and that it would be an impressive story, but just then she wondered if adventure were not an over-rated sport. As far as she could see the chief feature of danger was that it made moments when you felt most unpleasantly sick, and then turned safety into lassitude.

Looking back over the last two days she wondered that forty-eight hours could hold such changes. They were not only the changes of event, but the changes of mood. Her life had been like a plain hitherto; now it passed through strange country—love, contentment, despair, exaltation, terror—what peaks and what abysses, and how quickly she had passed from the one to the other! The human organisation was good which bore unmoved this wild travelling. Now she was on level ground for a moment, waiting, without speculation, for the next change, whether it were to the depths or to the mountains. Meanwhile, it was dull. Dane was too busy even to think of her, and not even the shade of the tent nor the liquid coolness of the silk against her skin could compensate for that.

The door-flaps rustled, and Derea, her boy, called from outside.

"Come in, Derea." He came in, worried, and with the dirtiest of dirty envelopes in his hand. In his inadequate English he told a story—something about a policeman who had been wounded ten miles away, and a jungli boy who wanted a rupee. Rhona took the envelope. It was a telegram.

"That's all right, Derea. Give the jungli boy some tea and sugar, and if he waits I will give him a rupee, but not now, later."

Rhona sat up and thought very hard about the telegram. She went to the tent door and peeped out. There was no sign of Dane. She came back, drew a deep breath, and opened it.

"Have decided in consultation with Cavell that reinforcements must be asked for and strong line taken. Previous telegram cancelled with regard to concessions. If possible, confer with Habr Awwal and Gadabursi chiefs. Keep them out as long as possible as troops cannot arrive before Monday at earliest, but do not commit yourself to promises on any important points as we shall be ready, if necessary, to take them on. Send news of Mrs. Cavell at earliest possible moment. Reply."

The telegram brought her husband vividly before her. The challenge, following them to the edge of civilisation, had been thrown after them by him. He was safe then, triumphant from the chastisement of Zeila and dominant in Berbera. Not that she had ever thought of him otherwise. Cavell sick or sorry was a picture beyond the reach of her imagination.

The settlement made with the chiefs was undone: the miracle he had wrought, wasted. Once more, on the very edge of success, Dane had been thrust back by Cavell. Then she realised something else, a grim fact which she could appreciate after the meeting with the tribesmen. There was enough in the telegram to kill Dane. Had the Governor realised that? Had her husband played with Dane's life out of indifference or of set purpose? If he had known that she was with Dane—— She tore the telegram and envelope into tiny pieces, rolled the pieces into a ball and put it in a pocket of her suit-case. It had evidently had a troubled history before it got into her hands. Who would know that it had not been even more troubled?

She called for Derea and, slipping from her wrist a thin bracelet that had been Cavell's gift, she made him give it to the boy in her presence, and then tell him to go away. She did

not care if the story did come out so long as it came out too late. She would even enjoy the telling of it to Cavell. She hardly saw how they could punish a woman for losing a telegram even if they cared to make the attempt.

She sat upon the bed, hands clasped, thinking deeply. How strange that she should know what was happening in the North and Dane should be ignorant. It would be a race for time now between Dane's campaign and Cavell's.

Dane came back, and called through to ask how she was, and went away: came and went again. Rhona changed into her frock and sat in the tent door. The chiefs would not let Dane alone. There he was, helmet pushed back, hands in pockets, arguing, ordering, listening, explaining. Haji Aden was at his side; Yusuf Ali came and went; the old sergeant was evidently quartermaster. How magnificently at ease Dane looked in this wild business and how happy! Men could have a constant joy in their lives that had no coil with women. Why could not women be the same? Some were like that, she had been told, but was their happiness ever so complete? She was not like them. She lived only in Dane's love; it was enough if she had saved him and his work, for both were great.

Dane's emphatic, slow Somali came across to her from where he stood by the half-made zariba. Men raised their voices for parting instructions. Were those damned Akils (she muttered this aloud) going to release him at last? When Dane saw her sitting there, he hurried over to her.

"I thought you might be asleep, and here you are, turned into a woman again. You were a brave boy to-day, Rhona. Are you feeling better?"

"Never felt bad, thank you."

"Little liar! I did. But we're all brothers now, and Yusuf Ali is my father. I do love these people, Rhona. I love the way their minds work. When you come to think of it, they're always right. And it makes life so simple. And now, precious woman, this is our last night. There is a limit somewhere, and I can't take the Colonel's wife into the firing-line with a crowd of friendlies. You're safe now, safe as a house—safe as the Bank of England, and to-morrow you will cross the border where the Consul will have an escort standing by."

"*Must* I leave you?"

"Of course you must. Can't I make you see what it means? The most I hoped in my wildest dreams was to keep these beggars out and save a debacle. But they're coming out to fight on our side——"

" On your side ! "

" Yes, on my side—the tribes who were disaffected, against whom the Rifles had to be strengthened, who weren't to be trusted in a crisis ! The Rifles have been sent—indefensibly sent—to Zeila, the crisis has come, and the tribes are rolling up to do the Rifles' real job for 'em. By God ! Rhona, I don't mean to muck this. I'll find Derea and wipe him out of existence, and then we'll see what sort of report His Excellency will make of it to save himself from the wrath to come. If I can do that, I can die happy."

" What do you mean ? "

" If I can only play my cards properly, things will be very different here from what they are now, and all that I've worked for and hoped for may come into being. Rhona, my dear, don't look so gloomy about it ! I love you, Rhona, my dear trek-comrade, my dear fellow-conspirator ! My success will be something I can give you. No, I shan't have to give it to you, it will be yours already, the fruit of our partnership. Oh ! here's Haji Aden, curse him ! It's those Gadabursi chaps. Poor devils ! They don't know if they're on their heads or their heels, but I think I'll be able to fix something up with them. Aden, this is the Memsahib. She has been a good friend to the Somal, and she gives us her good wishes for the fight."

Aden, who was all but a perfect specimen of manhood, even by Western standards, shook hands with Rhona, and spoke to her in good English, not unlike a Frenchman's.

" I am ver' proud to fight with de Major, Memsahib. He the only Englishman for whom my people would fight this day. I haf bring Memsahib a present of two sheep and the skeen of a lion we keel this week just here."

Before Dane went with him, he turned and took Rhona's two hands.

" I may be some time, beloved. You and I must talk before to-morrow. There is only to-night. We must use that, if necessary. Do you understand ? "

Rhona did not understand, but she nodded, and he strode off.

To sit and think was to think of Dane. Since midday he had her allegiance without reserve. There is a steel-like quality which no word expresses, which is the essence of man's nature ; a courage which is not endurance, a driving, combative force, and it is the man who has most of this power who masters the ugly crowd, reaches the end of the impossible journey in sand or snow, and, if he cares to exercise it, has an unlimited claim

upon the homage of women. This virility Cavell had; he wore it so that, like his well-cut uniform, it struck the eye at a glance. But Dane, strong in his own consciousness of past achievements and indifferent to the impression that he made, carried this power deep in his nature, devoting himself to interests that made no call upon it. If Rhona had been a man she would have known this instinctively, as the latest subaltern at the Rifles knew it. Yet it had been sweet to learn it as she had, and an experience not given to many women, to see her lover stand between her and death, and succeed from sheer power of mastery.

It was possible then to love him more, not because he loved her, but because, amongst these tribesmen, in this country, he was a king. If this were so, the questions she had shut out of her mind must be allowed to come and present themselves, and, as time was pressing, they must be quickly answered. She went in and sat upon her bed.

After a very late dinner, with a maize-coloured moon-rise just glowing on the horizon, they sat at the table, faced by the full realisation that they were about to separate. Dane was restless. He gave curt orders to the sergeant of police that he would not see anyone else that night, and was not to be disturbed on any less matter than the surrounding of the camp by Derea Waraba. Having insured his leisure he did not seem to know what to do with it. He asked Rhona three times if she were tired. Then——

"I don't think we'll stay here."

"Why not?"

"I suggest we do something—go for a walk or——"

He stood up suddenly and surveyed the night.

"Have you got your rifle?"

"It is in the tent. Why?"

"I thought we might stroll along the banks and see if we can pick out something in the nullah. It's a great place for game."

"What about my dress?"

"Well, would it take you long to change?"

Rhona, puzzled and meek, went into the tent to change. They walked out of the zariba, past the sentry. The police and camel-men were hunched round a fire, gorged on one of Rhona's sheep, and singing drowsily. The moon was high enough to make it possible to pick one's way amongst the aloes, which lay like great black starfish on the sand. The bank overhanging the river-bed grew higher and higher. At last they came to a bend, where it stood sixty feet above the tumbled landslides

at its base. Dane said it was a likely place, and they crouched in the clumped shadow of an *ergin* bush. As it was evidently expected of her, Rhona loaded her rifle, and fixed her eyes upon the channel below. Dane began talking very quietly, close to her ear.

"When the show is over, I expect you'll come back this way, and through to Berbera, where you will be able to get straight home if you want to. I shall not take you down if I can help it. I can't stand it. The strain is too great. So we say good-bye to-night. That is, if we can, Rhona, if we can."

"What do you mean?" said Rhona, trembling at the change in his voice.

"I don't know what I mean. This madness of saying good-bye—Rhona, have you any conception of how much I love you? I didn't mean to talk about it. Why do you think I brought you out here to shoot? You did load, didn't you? The moon will soon be high now. S-s-s."

He stopped. A grey form emerged from the bush on the lower bank opposite and moved down a track of slithered earth. Dane gripped his gun, changed his mind, and told Rhona to shoot. But Rhona looked just too long; the grey form misted into silvery sand at the end of her sights; her eyes stung with the strain, and, when she pressed the trigger, the beast, clear as daylight now, jumped sideways and cantered up the nullah.

"Too low, I think," said Dane.

"I'm awfully sorry."

"It was only a hyæna. There'll be some more. It's a regular track down there, so keep half an eye upon it."

For what seemed a long time they were silent. Though they seemed so still, their uneven breathing showed how little stillness was in their hearts. Then Dane began again:

"I've lived a queer kind of life, Rhona, knocking up and down Africa, but I've never played about with women. I've never really known a woman at all well. It's been an empty, lonely existence, working and waiting for God knows what. It's as if I had kept myself all these years for you, and now—how much worse will be the rest of the years? You can't understand. You're young; your life has been happy; you married; you never knew suffering until these months. Yet you think you have the right to be so cruel. I'm not trying to persuade you. Only now the last few hours have come, and I must speak. I want to understand what kind of a god it is to whom you are sacrificing me."

Rhona saw the danger of the rush of self-pity across a nature

usually so untouched by this emotion. She said to herself, "I will not think of all this parting means, or I shall break down. I will go through with it, and afterwards I will dare to think of it." Aloud she said, as dully as a mother going through the routine of rebuke:

"It does no good to talk like this."

"No good!" said Dane, with a laugh, smothered in deference to their hunting. But with a great effort he kept unspoken all that was crowding to his lips for utterance and leaned back, away from her.

All might have been well if it had not been shown to Rhona what they were doing. Suddenly and terribly it came to her. She knew, not only with her mind, but with every part of her body, that they were about to separate. Aware of the importance of calmness, of making no outward sign of what had happened within her, she struggled with herself, but a little noise, a half-sob in her breath, escaped. Dane's arms were around her at once, and for a moment she knew nothing but the relief of broken self-control and the sound of his voice murmuring in her ear, talking of love. She looked up; heard what he was saying.

"Why are you crying, dear woman of my heart? Because a man loves you more than anything else in the word, bows himself down before you and offers you his whole manhood? You don't know anything about love yet; you grasped at it like a girl and played with it. I know because I've waited all these years for you. You are holy and beautiful, and I would come to you like a pilgrim, with such reverence.

"We are together now, heart to heart, with your tears on my lips. Your tears! Oh, Rhona! I can taste them, cool and salt. Come closer to me, dear, dear . . . I can feel your heart beating against my side. Oh, God, how I love you! Who knows if we shall ever be together again? We are going far apart, and we can't tell what might happen. Supposing I were killed in this show, I should go blaspheming before God because, when I was so near to you, I had bowed before these foolish scruples of yours and never known your love."

Rhona whispered quickly like a drowning person trying to keep her head clear of the flood just long enough to call for help.

"Dane, tell me what I can do to save myself and you too."

"Nothing. Some things are written, and you know you don't want to save yourself. You want to fight, but you want to be beaten." He kissed her. "Haven't women been like that from the foundation of the world?"

"If I told you that I should shoot myself."

"You wouldn't do that. If you did, I would follow you out."

"And your expedition and your policy and your reputation in this country—not to speak of my own?"

"All count for nothing."

They were silent. Two hyænas trotted along the river-bed far below, unnoticed. The bush was quiet, but there was no peacefulness in the quiet. It was the deliberate silence of the hunter and the hunted. All the shadows were full of life: it was dark and Africa was wide awake. She thought that her fears of the night before had been right; it was not Dane who threatened her, Dane of the sunlight and the gardens and the *miskeen* camp. It was Africa. She felt it in herself, as though the ground she sat upon communicated its sultry passion, striking up through her limbs. Useless to pray, to stretch up your hands to the sky, grasping at some spiritual force there that might combat the tug of the forces, which, whether they strove towards the satisfaction of lust or blood-hunger, had never been bridled through the thousands of years. Why struggle any more? Of what worth after all was this European notion of virtue with which she was tormenting them both when Nature gloried unbound all about them, and the only ruler of their secret kingdom was the high African moon? When human beings were tempted above that they were able, might they not—must they not surrender? What power could deny them? What power that had made them—that had made Africa, dare deny them?

Then the knowledge came to her that if she failed now, she would surrender to the spirit of the country which, dimly she thought, was harlot and pagan. Because their love had once been an African love, it would bear the taint for ever. If she gave herself to the Dane who was ready to throw away work, life and honour for her love, she was crowning for her king the man's worst self, consecrating his worst moment. At whatever cost, she must cling to the promise they had made each other. Only so could they prove their love. There was one way out. With a violent movement she struggled free and walked away from him. Dane did not move out of the shadows. He sat still, watching her as she stood at the edge of the cliff.

"Dane, let us help each other now. Let us go through with this enterprise without breaking the promise we have made. If we can, it makes it possible for me to make another promise. When the work here is done, and you are home on leave, I will

come to you then openly, for always, at whatever cost to both of us."

Dane seemed unable to move, to speak or to understand what she had said. She had to go to him to caress and convince him. There are things it is easier to give than to receive. A deep sense of unworthiness weighed upon him, and when he stood up he would not take her in his arms, though she had no fear of him, so humble and almost child-like had he become. What she promised he accepted with amazement, but with such sureness that he built it at once into his life, and with a reverence that would only let him kiss her hands.

Rhona, hardly understanding, unconscious of any feeling but relief and the desire to sleep, walked back with him in silence to the camp.

XXVI

SUNDAY morning found the four main actors in this imperial event separated, the raider at large in the bush near Burao, resting after his rout of 'C' company; Cavell in Berbera; Rhona on a short journey into Abyssinian Somaliland; Dane on his way North to prepare the materials for his telegram to headquarters.

He and Rhona had taken an insignificant farewell. The bush around them was alive with men, their ponies restless in the urgent atmosphere. Rhona sat up in her saddle and gripped his hand, wishing him "God-speed." But something of last night's exhaustion, which was not all physical, weighed upon her. Just as they were about to wheel apart, Rhona had held him back.

"I wouldn't presume to advise you unless I were pretty sure of myself. And I am not going to give any reason for this particular advice. Don't go near Hargeisa, if you can help it."

Before he could say anything, she turned, and, waving back, trotted away with her small escort.

A parade-ground officer might not have seen much formation about Dane's friendlies, but there was enough. Dane knew his men; he communicated to them through the tribal leaders: they gave him their centuries' old experience of bush fighting: he gave them confidence and cohesion. If he could keep them in hand on the march, and for half an hour after they went into action, he was sure of success. Haji Aden was at his side, the chief's star in the ascendant again. If it had come to murder, rather Dane than he, but it suited him better to be riding by the D.C., appreciating every act and word by which, in two days' march, the white man built up his authority over the tribesmen.

Dane kept the men going hard until dusk, when he suddenly swung them right out of the track over a slight swell and into a hollow. A cheery night before action goes a long way with irregular troops and discipline with him was a means and not

an end. It was as if the earth had swallowed them ; here they could safely express their feelings. Dane rode round, planting his outposts, picked men all of them, and as soon as the commissariat caught them up, walking in on four hundred legs, he ordered that sixteen camels should be slaughtered.

Dane sat by his tent door, Haji Aden, Yusuf Ali and Didhr Fara squatting in front of him. The guttural song of the Somal came snarling out of the darkness from the nearest pickets, and a hundred fires mapped out the stretch of the encampment. He was happy. Rhona, with her golden hair and fairy presence was far away from him, but she was his for the rest of his life. No regrets troubled him. The time had come for him to stand in the open and fight. The long years of patience and restraint were over. Last night he had fought Rhona for herself and had won ; to-morrow he would fight, not Derea, but Cavell and the Governor, and prove himself the better man. He would wait no more upon the justice of God or men : he judged his own case knew that he deserved well, and would take with his own hands what he deserved.

The singing went on, monotonous and savage. Here and there the furious emphasis of the refrain and the clapping of hands told him that the men were dancing. Sometimes, above the thudding chorus, a soloist raised a few notes, cracked and quavering, yet, strangely, even more charged with menace. And presently, buried deep in his nature, chords began to throb in answer. His body felt warm with satisfaction. It was good to be a leader of fighting men, the brain directing these brown warriors, so physically perfect, so glad on the eve of battle. The song said that it was good to fight, that war was man's best game, not the war of the West, de-humanised by science, made dreary with numbers and sophistries, but war such as the African makes, straight from the heart, brave because women and loot are for the brave. In Africa death is no ghoul, stalking in the shadows and pouncing out upon old men and worn beasts. He does not drag on the skirts of decay, and he leaves no corruption behind him. He runs openly in the sunlight, a constant presence, gay and lusty, companion of the strong.

So Dane, gambling everything on a bush fight the next day, laughed to himself, handed cigarettes to his three chiefs of staff, and thought out his plan of campaign. On the march they had met two mullahs on horseback, who told them of Derea's latest depradations and that they had left him south-west of Burao. Gazing into the red-hot branches of the fire, Dane crossed the unknown number of miles and put himself in Derea's camp, in

Derea's place. He reckoned on the leader's desire to push forward upon Berbera while the golden moment lasted; he counted the cattle and camels, driven in from the plains around Burao, and all the miscellaneous plunder of the villages; he saw the born instinct of the raider asserting itself, the desire to get back to the frontier-home and secure the loot. Would the discipline of the irregular leader keep the noses of these cattle-thieves turned from home? It might not, and on that chance he must plan his action.

He brought out his map. It was his own map, based on a long survey of the Hargeisa district. Kneeling to catch the firelight, he puzzled out the route they would choose. In his mind he saw the raiders clearly, dropping south on tired little ponies, their formation frayed to rags in the rear, herds of cattle on the flanks and, behind, a following cloud of dust. Aden and Yusuf followed the stump of pencil down the paper. The map was a thing entirely beyond their comprehension, but they would have died rather than admit it. Dane, having no desire to make them feel fools, talked as he traced.

"This is Derea's march, if I mistake not, anywhere between these lines fifty miles apart; anywhere—but where will he water when he leaves Tug Alwein? Not Hargeisa, I think. Once his men hit the trail for home they are not going out of their way to find out what Hargeisa holds for them. Where will they water, Haji Aden? Water they must, with many thousand head of stock, where the water is plenty and easy to get. Here." The pencil came down on the dotted line of a nullah. "Here are the wells of Lafta Gedi in a wide tug. And here the banks are high on one side, and the ergin is thick. How long does it take to water five thousand head of cattle, with two thousand ponies, when you are already so near the border that you do not hurry—how long, Haji Aden? I think I know. Well, we may not meet there, but that is where we water to-morrow. What do you say?"

"Ayweh, Sahib." The Somals answered, and Dane stood up, gave his last orders for the morning and went to bed.

It was at Lafta Gedi they met.

Dane rode ahead to meet the two scouts, who came up, cracking their fingers and pointing backwards. Crawling between the ergin bushes that clumped the cliff edge, he peered down into the tug, and the long slope beyond it. Utterly unconscious of surprise, jostling, shouting, filling the air with the great murmur of a crowd, were a thousand or more of Derea's men. Along the track behind, for as far as Dane could see,

others were straggling in. He made a rough calculation that there must be three thousand in sight with seven or eight thousand head of cattle. Every man of them stopped short at the wells; not a single scout had crossed the tug to make a survey of the high cliff where Dane crouched. As he looked more closely at the throngs below him, moving and restless as water though they were, he saw here and there a tunic of the Rifles uniform—a bandolier—a government saddle, still glossy with polish. He thought of Rankin, and his lips tightened. He crept back to where the Habr Awwal, in a long and deep line, were halted behind their leaders.

Dane gave his orders; the chiefs handed them on. The flanks divided off, wheeled round and rode quietly east and west. The centre, picked rifles and riflemen, dismounted. After a pause measured by Dane's watch they crept after him through the bush. Just within hail, four hundred men, well mounted and in reserve, moved behind them. Dane's riflemen glided after him like cats; not a white cloth was to be seen amongst them. Just short of the brink, unseeing and unseen by a few yards, he stayed them. They had not long to wait. The two wings had made a wide detour and had crossed the river-bed without being discovered. A sudden shout, a sputter of fire that went ringing, echo upon echo, along the nullah, and then the pandemonium of yelling as the horsemen fell from both sides upon Derea's rear and made two cross-cuts clean through the untidy column, still streaming down the slope. Every man in the nullah faced round to the attack, and struggled to clear himself of encumbering neighbours and beasts. It was now that Dane gave his signal, and from his long line, packed amongst the ergin on the brink, the rifles spat down into the many hundreds, close-massed, immediately below them. The Somals were not marksmen, but here they could not miss; in a moment there were patches in the crowd like those a driving hail beats out in a young crop. From each side a leakage began of men running wildly along the river-bed, looking for cover. There were screams from the trampled men littering the sand, and the camels broke maddened from the wells and went bucking and springing in all directions. Some of Dane's riflemen jumped to their feet with cries of triumph. Dane ordered them down with a curse. Away beyond the wells the attackers were fighting desperately, but Dane looked still further, where the Gadabursi sections were bringing up two vasts herd of the dun-horned cattle. If they came on and took his men in the rear, the day would be lost. He had foreseen the risk when he decided that

the advantage of surprise demanded immediate attack. For a moment of sick strain he watched the movement of the sand-coloured droves. Thank God, they were turning, spreading in a great flow north-east. Fools, cattle-stealers, and the sons of cattle-stealers, as the Gadabursi were, the master passion had won, and they had thrown away their victory. Then Dane vowed that not a horn or a hide should escape him. He called up the akil with the reserve.

"Away with you—up the banks and down the first track! Show how you can ride! Hold up the cattle! Let the Gadabursi flee for the frontier, if you wish, and then come round and join me by the wells."

As soon as they were away, Dane came back to the cliff. No attempt had been made to storm his position, but ammunition was giving out, and, with it, his men's patience. As he came up, two sprang out of the ergin and, for their pains, pitched over into the nullah below. Where did that fire come from? Dane saw the hand of the leader in it. Away to the right of the *mêlée*, under a gōb tree and from the aloes about it, a score of rifles were spitting. There, he guessed, was Derea's Prætorian Guard, veteran outlaws, men of a dozen tribes, lean and scarred from a lifetime of hide-and-seek along the border.

It was no time to hesitate. In another moment his men would be cold. Their ponies were ready, just out of fire behind them. Dane's orders were passed along the cliff, and in two minutes the main body were thudding in his wake to the nearest track down the cliff. Dane yelled to them to open out, and the fresh ponies galloped in an extended line over the open ground of the nullah. A dozen ponies stumbled or dropped upon the sand, and as many careered forward, riderless, but they reached the gōb tree and then it was all over. Dane had a flashing impression of what he knew was the arch-raider, a huge, haggard head under a dirty green turban, and then the man vanished, clubbed and over-ridden. There was no quarter for Derea and his henchmen at the hands of the Habr Awwal; and the shock of their downfall seemed to run through the disordered ranks, for in a moment there was no more a battle, but pursuers and pursued, radiating in a great semi-circle from the wells and the cliff.

Half an hour later, under the gōb tree, Dane leaned upon Hais, who was calm and unruffled as from a game of polo, and wrote out a dispatch against his saddle.

This was the message that came to the Governor the next

morning, through the wireless station at Hargeisa, and froze him where he sat at his desk and Cavell where he stood by the door. Page told him the news. Both appreciated instantly all that it meant to them. The blow destroyed all barriers, shattered all deceptions between them.

"A damned fine mess you've made of this business," said the Governor, between his teeth. "How do you propose to get me out of it?"

But Cavell did not know. He stood silent. He re-read the telegram, but Dane left no loophole there. The victory was complete; by some miracle strange beyond anything they could have dreamed, even now almost beyond crediting, Dane had fooled all his calculations. The troops on the shore, so welcome a moment before, oppressed him; every minute they remained, every shilling they were costing, would be laid to his account, to be paid for in censure, in recall, in a broken career. The Colonial Office would see to that. Questioned by the War Office, that Department would need a scapegoat; plainly he saw that he would be chosen for the wilderness. Not that the Governor, now desperately searching his brain for some last stratagem by which to avoid responsibility, would escape, but, when you reach the uttermost depths of disaster, there is not much consolation in having a companion there.

"You've been wrong upon every single point upon which I have asked your advice."

"I'm not responsible for policy, sir."

"No; but you are for soldiering, by God! While the Rifles can't be trusted to carry through a paltry punitive expedition, an administrative officer, with a crowd of friendlies, mops up the most formidable body of raiders in this part of Africa." He stopped. Abuse was manifestly childish: "All right, Cavell, I know this sort of thing is no good. As far as I can see, we're both finished. But we've got to send for those Aden fellows now, and we may as well decide how much we are going to tell the beggars and then clear 'em out as quickly as we can."

"The man I'd like to find," said Cavell, "is the man who bungled our telegram cancelling Dane's orders."

"I think I should keep quiet about that telegram, if I were you, Cavell, under the circumstances." Almost instinctively, he was beginning to scheme again, like a man playing the last cards of a bad hand, hoping by some chance he has not reckoned on, he may yet win one trick before the game is over.

As soon as the conference was finished, Cavell went up to his room. It had a door and this he locked, and flung himself

down upon his bed. They had tried to bluff the Aden officers, but these had not made it easy for them when they learned that they had been brought over upon a fool's errand. Their attitude was a foretaste of the future. He had fallen like Lucifer from the heaven of his own self-confidence, but the courage of despair, which makes a hero out of Milton's Devil, did not come to his help. The torment of wounded pride, which he had first felt at Zeila, and had since kept at bay with a frenzy of activity, closed upon him. He was not the man to follow a middle path, and he was not young enough to start again. Was he, then, to be a Major Durell—why, even Durell had surpassed him! And his head was aching confoundedly—bump, bump, just above his right ear. His hands strained for the killing of the man who had done that to him. He sat up, gripping his head, a torrent of curses breaking from him. Then he fell back with a thud that jarred and left his mind empty a moment.

The bleak prospect soon reconstructed itself. Was there no comfort, not a bit of hope anywhere? To fail in one department of life is bad enough: he had failed in all. He had arrogated to himself the making of policy for this country, and his policy had ruined the Governor. He had failed as a soldier. Page would not tone down the story of Tarkusha to the Colonial Office: he would need that story to try and excuse his call for more troops. He had failed as a man, too; he had struck foul blows. If they brought his enemy down he would have forgotten them, but Dane had not been brought down, and at Lafta Gedi had proved himself all that Cavell was not. If he could only take the short cut out of this ignominy, but pride forbade that; suicide was ridiculous. Those who were ranged against him—as men always range in a ring to kick the one who is down—would be even more pitiless to him dead than alive.

Looking up at the ring, there was only one face that held any hope for him. Rhona was safe, Dane said. But if Rhona hated him and wanted to leave him before, how much more reason she had now? What woman would want to stay with a man who had made a public joke of his career? Yet, if he lost Rhona now, he was finished indeed: she took with her the last rag of his self-respect. With her at his side—beautiful, vital, with her influence and money still at his service, he might face the world again. True, if she had carried out her threat, it was she who had called for the first blow at him. But if she remained with him, she was his shield: the Olympian would be sparing of his lightning lest it should damage her head

How was she to be won ? He had failed with her : she had set at nought all his craft with women. He was too good an actor not to know that any attempt to assert mastery now would be an anti-climax. His instinct told him that compromise was useless ; with women only the grand gesture was effective, whether it was of entreaty or mastery. You could hold a woman if you stood over her, whip in hand ; and you could hold her if you were on the ground at her feet. Rhona would not deny this last hold. And would it be so very terrible a humiliation to him ? Was it not a luxury that his being was already crying out for, to bare himself before a fellow creature, relaxing his will and sharing his burden ; to have a woman bending over him, if not in love at least in pity, giving of herself to heal him ? After all, she was his wife, and he loved her. She had the power to save him. It was clear to himself what would happen if she left him. He was a drinker and a gambler : he had kept himself well in hand hitherto because it had been worth while. It had not been easy. Unless Rhona helped him, it would be impossible. Above all, he must get her at once out of this accursed country to where there was nothing to remind him or her of the contrast between Tarkuska and Lafta Gedi.

Ten thousand devils ! What was the matter with his head ? It was ringing like an iron-foundry. They must be playing the old game of Job up above. They had made it hard enough, surely, for him to keep his head erect, without setting this drum going in his right temple until he was mad with its reiteration. He would have to see the Doctor : there was no bearing it. Let the Governor and the Berbera people smile and assume that he was malingering like a whipped child. They could all go to hell so long as he could get a letter written to Rhona before he gave in.

" Rhona, dear little Rhona ! " He got unsteadily to his feet and went across to the writing-table.

At this time, on the other side of the shaab, the Doctor was successfully operating upon Rankin. It is one thing to operate successfully and another thing for the patient to recover after it. The Doctor looked very cross that afternoon when it was all over, and he looked down at the Irishman, lying still in bed again. Rankin's eyelids flickered up, and he smiled as he saw the other.

" Did I cut well, old monument ? " he whispered.

" Nicely, thanks."

" Any news ? "

"The best. Dane's minced them up near Hargeisa, and Derea's stopped one."

"Dane——" Rankin's face puckered up with the questions he was too weak to ask.

"Roped in the Habr Awwal. Lord knows how!"

"Good old Dane!" breathed Rankin, and then, petulantly, "My God! I wish I'd been there."

"I wish you had."

"And Mrs. Cavell?"

"Across the border."

"Am I going to peg out?

"I don't think so."

"Well, before I do, I'd like to have a word with her; fix it up if you can." His voice trailed away, but as the Doctor turned to go, he said: "Cavell and the Governor—what do they look like?"

"Oh, stop jawing, Rankin. I've been off drink all day on your account and I'm damned thirsty, I can tell you."

"Because if you could bring 'em in here for half an hour and let me look at their faces, I don't know, but I rather think, I should begin to get better."

"Oh, you'll get better, curse you! Cavell couldn't come, anyway. Got concussed last week and didn't know it until to-day. He's a wiry brute."

"*Thank* you," said Rankin, smiling sleepily. "You may go now."

XXVII

On Monday evening, Rhona, after a hard but uneventful ride with two policemen and two old akils, reached the border at Tug Wajaleh, where she was met by the Consul, an excellent and ambitious young man, devoid of imagination. He was extremely pleased to see her, as there was a great deal he wanted her to hear about the causes of the situation in Somaliland, and the difference between the Somals and the Abyssinians, in language, history, religion, and institutions. In spite of her assurances that it was quite unnecessary, he insisted upon setting out for Jig-jigga, the nearest Abyssinian post. She told him something of the meeting of the Habr Awwal, whereupon he explained to her the working of the tribal system. All the time they talked and rode, she grudged every step taken away from the border.

Rhona could not take any interest in Jig-jigga. She was aware that the huts were shaped differently from those of the Somal, and that there was some attempt at agriculture. She knew there was an endless stream of animals ranked by the wells between their camp and the village. The Governor (known in the M.R. Mess as the Jig of Jig-jigga), who came to call upon her, had a toga, white calico trousers, French cloth-top boots, a dagger, a collar of lion's mane, a parasol, and a wrist-watch. She told herself that all this was very interesting, and the Consul told her the same thing. Harrar, he suggested, was even more interesting. Hereupon occurred a battle of wills. The young man had firmly decided that it was his duty to take his charge to Harrar, his own base, and thence to Dire Daouw, the nearest station upon the French railway to the coast. Rhona was just as determined to trek straight back from Jig-jigga. Chance stepped in to postpone the issue in the form of a mysterious attack, apparently some kind of poisoning, which laid Rhona low in her tent. She was tended by a Gallicised Abyssinian woman, while her conductor sulked outside and bargained with

the Governor for a case of his cheap champagne, the only liquor in Jig-jigga, and which proved so sugary that he never got to the end of the first bottle.

Rhona, sick and sleepless, thought only of Dane's safety. Her thoughts beat round the narrow circle of possible tragedies —assassination at the hands of his fickle following—a spear in the night from a thwarted chief—a stray bullet in the fight. To her sick imagination the odds against him kept increasing. It was too much to ask of fortune that one white man, riding at the head of two thousand savages to meet three thousand others in battle, should come out unscathed. Fear would grip her suddenly and hold her, dry-mouthed and stiff as from a physical stroke.

When the news came on Thursday, Rhona wanted to hide from it. She saw the runner come to the other tent as she sat in front of her door. The Consul was very leisurely in coming across to her; even when she called out he hardly quickened his pace. She took the letter from him and vanished with it into her tent. It was from Dane, dated Monday, and began in pencil.

"Lafta Gedi.

"Do you know, dearest of all women, and wife to be, that this is the first letter I have ever written to you? And it does not seem strange that I should be scribbling it against my saddle, with dead men all round me. We came upon the enemy in the river-bed here about half an hour ago, and we've properly finished them off, including Derea himself. My people fought like tigers and, what was more remarkable, did what I told them. I'm not going to send this off now, beloved, as I am for Hargeisa, to pick up orders, but I had to put something on paper just to show you how near you were to me and to dedicate my victory to you."

The rest was written in ink and headed Tuesday night.

"Back in Hargeisa, very tired and busy. Have found everything untouched; all your dear things left scattered about the bungalow from your packing. The people here all over me. I feel like a royal visitor and am in serious danger of having my head turned.

"Prisoners at Lafta Gedi told me that they had smashed up 'C' company. That is now confirmed. Dear, I'm afraid poor old Rankin is pretty badly wounded. As far as I can make out he went straight for them, and, what is more, got 'C' company

to go with him. I always knew he'd be a lion in a scrap, and I hope to God he pulls through. I suppose you know he guessed all about us.

"Rhona, you are so near to me; I carry in my eyes the picture of your head, as it lay on my knees. The consciousness of your love is with me all day, whatever I am doing. I had to endure a sort of harangue from some of the leading akils here, but all the time the only words I could hear were, 'She is going to be your woman. She has promised.' I know I frightened you that last night, but you are great-hearted and you will understand. Would you have it otherwise? I don't think I am a brute really: in fact, looking back over my life, I give myself credit for being rather a controlled sort of person, but on this one point I am not a reasonable creature and don't intend to be. When I came back and saw my bungalow, with all the years of loneliness it stood for, I thought, 'Well, that's all over,' and when I saw your room, the room which you had shared with Cavell—well, I wanted to burn the whole place down as a sign that *that* was all over too. Instead, I sat on your bed and kissed the pillow where your head had been. There was a long golden hair on it, now in my pocket-book.

"(A deputation has just been to say that there is going to be a big dance to-night, and, of course, I shall have to be there. That means yelling and jogging and dust until the small hours. And they pretend it's all for my benefit, the jolly old liars!)

"Well, Rhona, I'm going to finish off this job and finish it off well. But it does not mean anything to me now. Now that you are coming to me, we must make our life in some other country. There is nothing in my life but you. Never dare raise a doubt again. My love for you is a great driving force, stronger than myself, and whatever you do or wherever you hide, it will find you out and capture you, because it is founded on a law of Nature, one of those immutable laws behind and above all human law, of which the old philosophers used to talk.

"Incidentally, I should think Cavell and the Governor are finished. When I got here I found a telegram had been sent, cancelling my previous orders, as they were getting troops from Aden. I don't know how they expected us to emerge alive, under those conditions. The clerk swears he sent two runners and that one went Gabileh way. I sang for joy when I read the wire, but I can't think how it missed us. They can't touch me now. I've got all the cards. There's no surer way to the heart of the Colonial Office than to be an economy, and that's what I've been.

"I hope you like the young man from Harrar—lucky man. I've sent him a line. I expect they will send Cheetham along to fetch you down to Berbera almost at once. I shan't see you again in this country. I am ordered off at once to settle up with the Aysa people, whom Cavell left buzzing like bees, but they won't give any trouble. I was in Zeila at one time, and I know them well. I set out on Monday, when Jackson comes up here. No Rifles, of course.

"Take care of your sweet and beautiful self, and remember every breath that you take that you are mine, mine, mine. Dear woman of my heart, I kiss you on the hair and the brow and the lips, worshipping you as if you were the Virgin Mary herself.

"Dear, I am nothing in the world except your lover. I give you my whole life to do what you like with."

Rhona sat long over the letter. Her thoughts were of joy for Dane, and sorrow for Rankin. She had never thought of Rankin as being in great danger. She had imagined him riding quietly north to join the other companies. To think of him wounded was pitiful. Could he not have disarmed misfortune with a jest? Death, surely, would hesitate to quench a spirit so rare. She longed to go and see him, and give him love and thanks simply for being what he was, a fantastic, laughing, dreaming creature, who had been kind to her.

All afternoon she lay upon her narrow camp-bed, reading and re-reading the letter until she came to know how each sentence she began was going to end. The more she read, the more sure she was of its effect upon her. She was frightened. Some woman's instinct beyond all argument was afraid. She told herself that this was news of success greater than their hopes. Her love had taught her that he was a master amongst the official world in Somaliland. Now, at last, he had asserted his mastery, justifying her love and making her proud. His success as a soldier was the last stroke of the brush upon her picture of him, making him complete as a man. Was it not worth while to have lived if only to be loved by such a man, the friend of the poor, the gardener of the desert, who handled the tribes as easily as if they were flocks of sheep, and who made so light of his skill in war that he had given up the great game for a Service which he ranked more highly? That he should have chosen her above all women to love was an honour to be worn like an invisible crown upon her head.

Why, then, was she afraid? She was afraid of Cavell and of

all the conflict and bitterness through which she would have to go before she could belong to her lover. But these were small fears beside the one which oppressed her now : they clouded the surface ; this one was working its way into the very heart of her happiness.

Slowly, as she lay still, gazing at the blue and yellow pattern of the tent wall, she began to understand. It was Dane's love which frightened her. Was Dane perfect ? If so, why was she afraid of him ? Why had he failed her as he had that last night at Jafa Uri ? His love—he said it himself—was a force which had got beyond his own control, and as such it threatened them both. It challenged every law to which she had hitherto bowed her head ; could it live in a world held together by these laws ? Did it not demand a world of its own, an isolated world, built up by their own hands and not strong enough to endure the years ? He was ready to fling aside everything—his gardens, his *miskeens*, his reputation and the great opportunity which had come to him now. Was it right for a man to love like that ? Was it even the best kind of love ? Long ago a poet-lover had said that it was not, and thousands had quoted his lines.

> "I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honour more."

She could not remember the rest of the verse, but the words suddenly lost their staleness, and she groped back across the centuries towards the man who had written them. Did he string the words together for the sake of a fine sentiment and a fine rhythm, or were they true, a beautiful, bitter thing that he and his lover had discovered for themselves ?

How was she to judge the worth of this instinct that would not let her be happy ? It was an idealism carefully nourished in her by training at home, at school, in Church. Society conspired to develop this instinct, especially in women, because all the average human beings that make up society had drawn up the programme of life to suit themselves. Was she, gifted with this glorious love, to fling it away because they had educated her courage out of her ? Just as all great men broke political laws so that they might re-make them, so should great lovers break the social laws.

Moreover, it was not for her to judge. Men were the masters of this world, and her man had made his decision. God had made man physically stronger, able therefore to enforce his own moral code upon the woman. It was a kind of insolence

in her to assume that her morality was higher, when in every other department of life he was her superior, in charity, courage, wisdom, intelligence. Even if in this one thing she had an idealism he did not share, would it not be a joy to sacrifice it for him, and out of the great generosity of love give up her soul as well as her body to his keeping.

"Mrs. Cavell!"

Back she came to Jig-jigga and the immaculate Consul and the need of tidying herself, and being rather nicer to him, because, after all, he had come far out of his way to help her. "How selfish love is!" she thought, as she combed her hair; and next, "God be thanked for the discipline of circumstance. For two hours I will not think; I will talk to him and think of what I can see, herds of cattle, rock-rabbits, jackal-holes, and, far away to the south-east, five mountain-crests."

That evening the Consul, who had decided that the Colonel's wife was what he called "a good-looker, but rather a stick," revised his opinion, and dropped his official manner until she resisted once more his desire to push on to Harrar and carry out his railway scheme.

The next day another runner came through with letters from Berbera, and orders in a telegram, sent on from Hargeisa, that Rhona was to set out on Sunday to meet Cheetham on the border and go straight through to catch the next boat from Aden. The Consul was annoyed, and put on his official Foreign Office manner, while Rhona stood, fingering Cavell's unopened letter, until she could read it in the privacy of her tent.

Even there she sat still, turning it over, sick at heart because it could contain nothing she wanted to hear; because to her Cavell was like one dead, and she hated the letter which forced her to see that he was alive.

She took it slowly out of the envelope. After all, why should she read it? She was not bound to let him hurt her any more. She tore it twice from side to side, and paused. It may have been by accident or because she was a woman that she could not help seeing the writing that lay along the uppermost strip.

"... will be recalled soon, and they'll probably send old Chard out again to lull the country back into its old sleep. After that, anything might happen. They might even make your friend Dane Governor, and run the Protectorate on the lines of bread and circuses—nursery gardens and famine-camps."

And on another strip sticking out she caught nine more words, "... if I recover from the injury to my head."

"I won't know any more; it's nothing to me," said Rhona aloud, and went on resolutely with her tearing.

She sat and wondered why she did not care enough to read her husband's letter. Was it really Rhona of Chantrey who was so indifferent to this man that he might have been a stranger or a character in a book, for all the interest she took in his fortunes? She tried to break down the callousness, feeling that, if she remained so hard, she would not be able to bear her own company a moment longer. But the only thing of which she could think was the first news she had read on the torn scrap. That touched her. It opened an issue that she had been telling herself half the night long was closed.

"Governor!" she whispered, and repeated the word as if it fascinated her.

As she rode with the Consul that evening, full of incommunicable thoughts, she turned to him suddenly and said:

"Do you really think it is worth while to keep Somaliland—that we're doing good work there?"

"You are asking a very big question," he replied, heartened by this sign of grace. "A much bigger one than the Colonial people are willing to see. *We* view the whole thing from a different angle, you understand, an international angle. First of all, let's reckon up the various factors. There's Aden on the one side. On the other there is Italy, England, France, and don't forget the French railway—*very* significant. Then there's Abyssinia. Those are the pieces of the puzzle. It remains to put them together. First clue—economic. Second—geographic. Consider the map——"

But Rhona was no longer listening. Her companion had pulled up in order to draw diagrams against a sand-bank with his riding-crop. She looked over his shoulder at the sky. Behind her, over the Gureis range, the sun was sinking, and already the clouds were massing around him, preparing a gold and purple sunset. Straight in front of her, almost due east, the plain lay in interminable folds to the horizon. Under that blue-green twilight, pricked by one pale star, lay the country from which she had come. The border was a line drawn with ink upon a map: the face of Nature on each side was the same. Why did that country mean so much? She had never heard of it two years ago; might never see it again once this month was over. It had made her suffer. It had wrung her with its own pain, torn her illusions to shreds, revealed her husband to her and given her in return a love, saying, "Take it if you can! Take it if you dare!" This country should be called by a name meaning

"the country that must be served." Where was her decision now, built up of long hours of thought and argument? In a moment it had collapsed. She thought and argued no more. She simply knew that she would do what had to be done. Cavell and his letter had not reached her heart, but that desolate horizon called to her, and she bowed her head beneath the sky, now quickly darkening, because she knew that, unwilling, driven by a force she could not name, she would answer that call.

She wrote her letter about midnight, painfully, sitting up in bed with a writing-block upon her knees and a hurricane lamp on the table beside her.

Sheet after sheet she covered, now writing rapidly, now with her head upon her knees, now gazing up at the tent roof with her hands clenched, as if in protest against the power that drove her to the thing she was doing. Still the pages grew, flaked the bed, snowed over on to the floor. The writing grew tired and wild—entreaties, arguments, explanations and outpourings of her love, which left her empty of emotion. At last, sick with effort, she gathered the sheets together, arranged them with difficulty, and read them with dry, stinging eyes. The written words dragged her feebly back across the heights and depths she had just traversed. Written agony, written entreaty, written love—all faint, futile and unworthy, an insult to them both. She divided the thick sheaf, folded the leaves into strips and burned them one after another, the sweat running off her brow at the breath of the flame. Blowing out the lamp, she fell back upon her bed and lay motionless and awake through the four hours that remained of darkness.

At last, just when, by pulling a flap of the tent, the first comfortless glimmer of dawn could light her bed, she wrote, covering not half a page.

"I have tried to write to you, and I cannot. I have only one thing to say. What is the good of wrapping it up in thousands of words? I cannot keep my promise, and you will release me from it. I cannot take you away from Somaliland after the wonderful things that have happened in these last few days. I am glad I shall not see you again. When this finds you at Zeila, I shall be just going, or gone. I love you more than my life, more than happiness. Dane, help me, for I am having to break my own heart."

XXVIII

RHONA'S letter went off that evening, and she herself the next day. Two and a half days to the frontier and two days on to Hargeisa. Cheetham, with ten of the Rifles, met her on the border. Here her two old akils took their leave of her. She kept them back, talking to them, exchanging presents and compliments; they were a link with her lover. They gave her two Somali daggers and rode away very contentedly to claim full payment for their services in the Hargeisa court.

The young diplomat gravely handed Rhona over to the young soldier, who accepted the charge equally seriously. The Consul was too much of a gentleman to tell Cheetham what he thought, but he did not anticipate a very pleasant journey for the other. Rhona thanked him sincerely, knowing that he had thought only of serving her and feeling that he was a young man who would go far.

In spite of all the strain at Jig-jigga the enforced rest had done her body good. She was in excellent training now and was surprised herself how little the trek had tired her.

Cheetham, elegant and lissom, was much more self-confident after the engagement near Burao, and had less need to be careful what he said to Cavell's wife, now that the Colonel was under a cloud. He talked Eton and Winchester for a long time. It was a perfect obsession with him to work out connections and generations, and, in Rhona's friends and brothers, he had a crowd of pawns for his game. Hour after hour it went on.

"No, after all, I think that must have been in your youngest brother's time. He was in old Naylor's house, wasn't he? He must have known my godmother's son, Findlater, a red-headed bloke with a notion of being a missionary, who was sent down from Oxford for driving a bus into one of the quads, or trying to. You must have heard of old Findlater. He *was* a quaint bird; a cousin of Barry-Smith who got scuppered

up in the North-West the year before last—you know the Barry-Smiths at Dorchester. Well, the same family."

He paused a moment, so Rhona murmured, "Oh, *those* Barry-Smiths!" and got him going again.

One thing she did listen to and that was news of Zeila and Berbera, and his account of the fight near Burao. Here and there in this story, where his self-consciousness did not quite obscure the picture, she could catch a glimpse of her friend.

"You know what a priceless bird old Rankin is. Went along in his happy-go-lucky-be-damned-to-you Irish way. What do you think he was doing all Monday morning—singing hymns, by Gad! Telling yarns about Amalekites and Assyrians, and what-nots. When I saw that panorama looming up in the horizon, my teeth fairly chattered." He smiled. "As for Rankin, he did a sort of Highland fling on his pony, dancing all round the men, and working them up until they were all singing and grinning themselves. I don't know what the C.O. would have said about the fancy way we went into action. I tried to save my skin, and lodged a protest, for the thing was simply silly. But all Rankin would say was, 'I came to this country for a scrap, Cheetham. What did you come for?' and fool-talk like that. (I never have thought the Irish were altogether sane, have you?) The thing was really absurd, a hundred against three thousand—no surprise, no advantage of ground, no cover. Rankin made right for the van, where he thought Derea was, and never attempted to form square. He dumped the led camels in what he called a depression, and we went for them at a run, and gave 'em rapid fire, lying in a sand scratch which Rankin, who was rolling his r's like a stage Paddy, called a 'pr-r-ovidential tr-rench.' He reckoned Derea and his brigade were in front. If so we must have cut 'em up good and hearty before we started falling back on the camels. That's what Rankin was after, mincing up the élite in front before the others could straggle up. That's why we weren't wiped up in ten minutes. I think there must have been seven dead of theirs for every one of ours, and, my hat! the din those fellows kicked up as they came on."

"I expect it made all the difference," said Rhona.

"How do you mean, Mrs. Cavell?"

"At Lafta Gedi. That Derea had lost so many of his best men. It may have turned the scale."

"Possibly," said Cheetham, who had not expected comment from her. "I will say our fellows fought like wild-cats. What's that French word?—*éclat, lané* or something of the kind.

Naturally I thought it was all up, and I was jolly glad, I can tell you, when Rankin stopped one and gave me an excuse to clear with what was left. You couldn't see me for dust when I got going."

"How did you get him out?"

Here, where Cheetham might justly have claimed credit for a magnificent and heroic piece of work, he paused and coughed.

"Oh well, the men made a bit of a square while they got him on to a pony, and we cut out just as the rest of them came floating up for pickings. Rankin's sergeant stayed behind and kept the machine-gun going for a bit to give us a chance."

"Was Rankin unconscious?"

"On and off. The first thing he asked me was how many men we had lost, and he seemed worried about it. Then he muttered something like 'I think Dane would say I was right.'"

"And the sergeant?"

"Oh, they'd get him all right. But he must have done some execution first. He was a Gadabursi, too. Funny, that! I wonder how old Rankin is! We shall find the Colonel at Hargeisa, with the latest news." Rhona just checked her exclamation of dismay, while Cheetham explained that his head was not so bad as the Doctor had thought at first. "So H.E. sent the two companies up to Hargeisa. Quite unnecessary, but probably the last thing he'll be able to do to annoy Dane, and one can't altogether blame him. It was rather funny. We passed Dane coming through from Burao. He was outspanned just off the track. He came forward and stood leaning against a tree to watch us go by. All our chaps yelled out to him and told him what a fine fellow he was, and Durell side-stepped and fell on his neck. I was in the rear with Cavell. You can imagine how all the others cocked an eye backwards for it was really rather interesting. So the O.C. rides up to him——"

He broke off, remembering to whom he was talking.

"Go on," said Rhona; "I'm just as interested as they were. Don't mind me."

"'Well,' he says, 'good afternoon, Dane. I gather our lines at Hargeisa are untouched.' 'I left them all ready for you,' replies Dane, in that rather demure way he sometimes has. 'And the bungalow?' 'All in order,' says Dane, as if he was a house-agent and liked the profession. 'You'll find police on duty at the store-houses.'

"Cavell thanked him. This was where I wanted to cut in and tell Dane what I thought of him. We were none of us too

decent to him in Hargeisa, and he never took any notice of it. But Cavell said at once: 'Get on, Cheetham. Don't you see I want to talk to Dane?' So I trailed off and left them. But, do you know—here's the funny thing—I don't believe they said anything at all. I never heard a word spoken, and next minute the O.C. trotted up and I looked round and there was Dane, supporting a tree and looking after us. So I gave him a wave of which he didn't take any sort of notice, and turned to make myself agreeable to the O.C. But he wasn't having any, either. Never said a word all the way. It's my belief, Mrs. Cavell, that's his head's a great deal worse than he lets on. He wants looking after."

"Oh!" said Rhona, faintly. "How did he hurt his head?"

"Took a nasty toss at Zeila," Cheetham replied firmly.

Rhona had not for a moment expected to find Cavell at Hargeisa. She had imagined the place empty and had intended to go to each spot made dear by love, taking her farewell.

The reversal of her plans worried her strangely. Since she had sent her letter to Dane she had been in a kind of dream. She had kept her will fixed upon hurrying out of the country. Once she was on the ship, with the water between herself and Berbera, then she might think. Her terrible letter had gone to do its work. No use to wonder and wonder at what moment it would be opened and Dane understand what she had done to him. Useless to picture the expression upon his face, the agony and bitterness of the hours to follow. She had broken her word. Thank God she had not to see him! But, because she could not think of the big thing, she thought of the small things; her mind fastened on them to save itself.

They were coming into Hargeisa now. Here was the track where she had ridden with him, sand, aloes and thorn, like every other track for hundreds of miles, yet how different! Each thorn tree was a familiar friend, its shape remembered, and the spread of the aloes mapped for ever in her mind. There was the parade ground. Was it days or years since they had galloped in the sunlight and she had called out to Rankin that this was heaven?

"Dear Hargeisa! Dear sanctuary! Never in my life will any place be to me what you have been, and now I am robbed of the sweet hours I would have spent here, saying good-bye to you, and storing you up in my memory."

She was frightened of Cavell. She had not thought out what she was going to say to him. His violence before would be nothing to his violence now that he was cornered and ruined.

She must stand in front of it as best she could, hearing nothing, showing nothing, and then, get away, get away.

She had not thought that she was such a coward. She was trembling all over as she rode up alone to the bungalow.

Cavell was upon the veranda. As soon as he saw her coming he got up and went indoors. Dismounting, she followed him. He was not in the sitting-room. She went into the bedroom and found him standing at the other end. They took stock of each other across the room, which seemed dim as a church after the midday glare outside. At last he said, quietly :

" You got my letter ? "

" Yes, but I didn't read it ; I tore it up."

He made an exclamation at this. She did not know that up to that time he had been standing desperately on the defensive. Now, for the first time since the moment he had heard Dane's news at Berbera, some fire blazed up in him. His passionate entreaties, the letter in which he had bared himself to her pity, had been tossed aside, not worth her reading. Anger came to his aid at last.

" You destroyed my letter, did you ? Now, what do you expect I am going to do with you ? "

" Nothing. We can have nothing more to do with each other. Don't you understand yet how I regard you—almost as if you were a murderer. When I look at you, I think of Blaker and of the innocent people you have just killed at Zeila to help your career. And I think of how you have tried to ruin Dane's work and all your other cruelty and selfishness."

" I see." Cavell's face changed. " And do you think that for these reasons you can just cut adrift from me ? Have you forgotten that there are such things as marriage laws, and you can't dispense with them by saying : ' I don't like him—I don't approve of his policy.' "

" I haven't thought about it. It did not occur to me that you would attempt to make a woman who hates you live with you as your wife."

" Didn't it ? Then all I can say is that you don't know much about the world. You've done your best to ruin me. Now that I'm finished, have lost everything but you, you expect me to stand aside like the repentant villain in the play and say : ' I release you ! ' "

" Oh ! it's useless to talk like this. Can't I make you understand ? You mean no more to me than if you were the picture of a man standing over there, and this conversation is no more real to me than if it were an imaginary conversation in a book.

I've said all I have to say now. When you are at home you can come to Chantrey and hear it again."

"And yet," said Cavell, "it isn't two years ago since you stood at my side in the church there, making vows and praying in a kind of religious exaltation. You've absolved yourself pretty soon, but I suppose you've made it all right with your God. Come and sit down; I can't see you over there." Rhona sat on the bed while Cavell looked into her face and sought about for some weapon that could touch her. "I know women, Rhona; they go for success like butterflies to the sun. There's something more in this attitude of yours than hatred for me. I suppose you've been bestowing your favours upon Dane. Even Dane must seem attractive now he's cock of the walk, and I'm . . . what I am. The spoils to the victor. I know what happens when a man and a woman get thrown together, hour after hour, night after night. You may as well tell me."

Rhona was silent. He had touched her now. She saw, and shuddered to see, how her love must appear to other eyes. Cavell's face went white and he fought for self-command. At last he said, "Some men would kill their wives for that. A month ago I'd have felt that way: now I'm only surprised because I thought you were different." Rhona said nothing, wondering at herself that it seemed so small a matter whether he thought her unfaithful or not. Suddenly he broke out with a violent exclamation. "It's not true, Rhona. You haven't been unfaithful to me!"

"I have not been unfaithful to myself. No thought of you would bind me." She thrust at him, hoping by cruelty to make the meeting intolerable and so end it.

Cavell stepped nearer, where the light fell upon him, and she saw how changed he was. There were fine new pencillings round his eyes, and his face, though it could never lose its clear magnificent lines, seemed older and looser. Fascinated and unmoved, like a woman watching an actor from the stalls, she saw his face working with emotion and the bitter fight to control it. He threw himself down upon his knees, seizing and releasing her with his hands as he entreated. Then Rhona realised fully how strange a thing is the death of love. Those hands into which her own had always found their way by instinct now fumbled at the grasp. Her body had always slackened at his touch; now it grew rigid, every muscle recoiling as of its own volition. She had often seen his face so close to hers, but now she observed the details of it coldly, as if it had been a stranger's. He was a stranger, and as such it was distasteful and a

little ridiculous to have him holding her and pleading so passionately.

"Rhona, have you nothing left for me? I know I deserve nothing from you, and I am worse even than you think. I want you to know the very worst about me. Of course I knew Blaker was not fit for Zeila, but you should not have interfered. My pride would not let him come to Hargeisa so that my officers should say you were a fool with him. I didn't care what happened to him; he was on the other side. Dane—I hated him. I hate him now. The very thought of him makes me mad. I met him on the way here. Nothing happened—because it couldn't happen before the Rifles. As for his irrigation, I waited until I knew it was doomed that night before I tried to turn the animals. Thank God! I can still chalk that score up against him. But there are other things—sins against you, which you must know. My code of morals isn't yours, Rhona. I've lived no better and no worse than other white men in the tropics. Drink—and the other things. Yes, even after our marriage. Dane knew and I suppose he's told you—God damn his soul!

"And yet, Rhona, you mustn't leave me. Don't you realise that I'm down and out? Why, I've nothing left in my life but you. Did I strike you? Did I strike you, you poor little girl, and did you think I didn't care? When I left you here I thought of nothing else but you and what I had done. It wasn't me, but some wild beast in me. I paid for it—all the way to Zeila and ever since. All the time I was fighting your influence—a losing fight. Rhona, haven't I paid in full? My own men knocked me out at Zeila. Think of that and what it means? My head is still unbearable, but I couldn't stay amongst those vultures at Berbera. Then, Rhona, when Dane's telegram came and I knew the game was up and that cur Page rounded on me, I wanted to shoot myself. Do you think I don't know what will happen? I shall be recalled and sent back to my regiment in India under a cloud; all the years I have put in out here wasted and worse than wasted. I haven't the heart to live it down and begin again. If you leave me——" he broke off suddenly. "Rhona, did you do what you said you would—did you write to your uncle?"

Now Rhona hardly knew how to answer. There was no need; Cavell guessed from her hesitation.

"You did. Well, that clinches it."

"Not only that," she said. "Dane sent the same information to Chard. And—and——" (She had thought to enjoy telling

him this)—" it was I who intercepted that telegram to Dane. He never saw it. I destroyed it."

For a moment he stared up at her and there was unbearable tension. Then, to her amazement, the tears came into his eyes and he smiled.

" You devil! You did that! If I'd had you on my side, I should have won." He stood up, suddenly calm, and walked away from her. It was as though, with his last hope gone, there being no more need to struggle, he had found a kind of courage. " I think I see at last," he said, turning and leaning against the wall at the other side of the room, " just how much you hate me. I've had a pretty good opinion of myself all my life, so I find it hard to catch your point of view. The tragedy is, Rhona, that you did not understand me when you married me. I can't remember playing the hypocrite. I was then just what I am now, except for one thing. I didn't really love you then and I do now. But you had no insight, and for that I have to pay."

Rhona began to be afraid of this new Cavell. For the first time her strange feeling that he was not a real man began to desert her. He went on, still staring down.

" Funny, that a question of policy should come into our lives like this. For there *are* two points of view, Rhona, and I think it is you and your Danes and your Chards who are going to muck up the Empire. I don't mean that sending young D P.O.s where they'll get murdered or breaking up another fellow's garden is a necessary point of policy, but you and I would have drifted apart without that. If you knew anything about history, or if you'd studied native races in other parts of the Empire, you would understand our point of view. It's people like you, who sentimentalise over individual niggers, who'll send the whole East to hell. If the alternative to shooting one native in ten thousand per annum to keep 'em in order is to give self-government to races unready for it by six hundred years or more, well, I plank for the killing every time. And I'd go round and do it all myself, *on principle*, and because I believe in the Empire. And, before you're twenty years older, you'll know that I am right." He paused again. " Rhona, just how fond were you of Blaker ? "

" As fond as I am of Roger." She named her youngest brother.

Cavell nodded. " I think so. You remember, last time I was here, I burnt his letter to you. I'm sorry I did that ; there was no particular point in it. He wrote you another, immediately afterwards I imagine, which we found upon his body. He

didn't suffer much; they speared him through the back." He felt in his pockets. "Sorry it's so crumpled."

Rhona glanced down at it. She did not mean to read it in front of him, but she caught the sentences in which he spoke of Cavell and looked up wondering.

"Did you read it?" He nodded. Rhona frowned at him in astonishment until, unable to bear that familiar wrinkling between the clear brows, he dropped his eyes. This new immobility and his gift of the letter distressed Rhona. The last impression of unreality left her. She was stirred out of her deadness by a prick of feeling for him, the first faint touch of pity.

"Thank you," she said. "That was generous; I could not have expected it. His letter will mean a great deal to me." After a moment she went on. "I know that what is happening is terrible. Anyone who heard us would say that I was heartless and wicked. But I do not feel as though I had done anything. Things are as they are; we cannot change them. The whole truth is this—I do not love you any more. If I wanted to—if I tried with all my heart, I could not do it; it is out of my power. Yet there is something in what you say about yourself, and that it is I who have changed and not you. I'm sorry—sorry that I married you when I was so young and knew so little of life. I can't say more than that in case you should misunderstand."

"I understand well enough," he said. He had thought that her coldness and hatred marked the depth of bitterness. This quiet explanation was worse.

"Is it any good," said Rhona, distressed herself as he grew more rigid, "to tell you that I am desperately unhappy too? Life holds no more for me than it does for you. It is not only you who pay. One thing I think I can do, if you will accept it. I can try and make the future less black for you than you expect. There must be work that you can do and do well. What is it and where? Help me to help you."

Cavell shook his head, pride wrecking this last chance.

"There is only one thing I would ever accept from you."

"And that is?"

"Yourself. Because I am no longer making a fool of myself, nor yet threatening you, you're at once beginning to mistake me. I've no intention of ever releasing you. I'm not asking you any more questions about Dane. But, also, I'm taking no chances. If there were one in a thousand that he would get you, I should want to make sure. The facts are so simple, Rhona; you do not love me; I love you and I hate Dane. I hope that he loves you. That's all."

Quietly, having reached a position beyond all argument or struggling, Rhona said :

" I understand. And now, will you arrange for me to go straight on with my journey ? "

" But you must be tired ? "

" I had a long rest at Jig-jigga, and we took it very easy to-day."

" Very well ; rest here until tea-time. I have arranged for Grainger to take you as far as Sheikh. Peterson, the new D.P.O., will fetch you down to Berbera. Forster fixed up about your passage and will give you all instructions. If you take it easy, you will just catch the boat, I should think, with twelve hours to spare. I've had all your things here packed up ready."

" Thank you," she said.

" I'm going across to the camp and I'll make all arrangements. You must have a good rest now and a meal before you start." He looked back from the door. " It's no good trying to rest with your boots on. Hold out your foot ! " He drew off her boots one after the other, pulled the curtains across the window, and went out.

That was the last Rhona saw of him. At half-past four Grainger appeared with fresh ponies and an escort, and they set out along the track for Sheikh.

XIX

So Rhona re-crossed the place of thirst.

For all she could remember afterwards of Grainger, she might have crossed it alone. She was becoming accustomed to travelling with young officers, talking to them, smiling at them, while all the time she was thinking her own thoughts. This time, having discovered that Grainger intended to ride his pony, she decided upon a camel.

"No," she said, "please don't cross me. This may be my last journey in Somaliland; let it be picturesque. And you cannot be nice to me all day long, can you? You will appreciate me far more at the halts if you have been riding your own pace and with your own company."

So all day long, soundlessly trotting, Rhona passed through the wraith of a forest that blinds the plain near Hargeisa. She did not see the escort, or Grainger, far below on his pony, passing her and being passed. The shoulders of the great beast heaved under her as regularly as a machine, the head outstretched and nodding like that of some strange bird. The head-rope hung slack in her hand. She and Somaliland were alone together.

"I wonder if I shall ever ride a camel again. I should like to turn round and ride straight into the heart of Africa, clean across Abyssinia and the Sudan, until I was so tired that I could go no further and could lose myself somewhere in the Sahara, some part of the desert which still has no name.

"How steadily we go on! We are leaving it all behind us, and I do not want to leave it. Sand and stones and grey trees. How I hated and feared you before! How long ago is it since I passed here? It is absurd to reckon in months. It is all my real life, and a whole age ago. I wonder if in all the world there is a place more savage than this. It is desolate, desolate, an outcast among the lands. It hates even its own children. How much more does it hate us strangers! But never all my life shall I love another country. I would rather die here than live

anywhere else. I can feel already the hours and the nights when I cannot sleep, when I shall long for this land, year after year, aching with desire. I shall try and see it again, closing my eyes and calling up the picture of the bush, the skimming of thorn trees, the interminable thread of the track, the escarpments, the blinding white sand in the nullahs : I can see it all now. I will look and look and try to remember always the aloes and the sand, and just how the sun beats upon shoulders and wrist and knees. I must be mad. I yearn over this country and it tribesmen ; they are child-like and fierce, and how little they would understand what I feel for them—Haji Aden and Yusuf Ali and Hassan, and *his* orderly, Lurgeh. They will live out their days and never know how often in another country I shall call up their faces. I have built them into my life.

"As for *him*—if only I might suffer for him ! If only I could know what he is thinking ! He may never write to me again, and then I shall be left all my life wondering what he thought. Surely, because he loves me, he will know there was nothing else to do but this.

"I have broken my word, but a promise like that can only be kept in the spirit. Yet I am glad that I need not see him again, because I could not bear his suffering, knowing that I had made it. The thought of him frightens me. I am a coward, like one who dare not kill, but hires an assassin and then hides away.

"I wish I were old. I am too young. I am going thousands of miles away, and when I am forty this will be nearly twenty years ago, a memory getting dim. I must not forget, I must cling to my memory and my unhappiness, for if I forget I should be hateful, and I should hate myself. Could I forget *him*—his face looking down into mine as I woke up on his knees ; and how he carried the *miskeen* woman to his horse, and the moment when he called me to his side amongst the Habr Awwal. He will go on working here alone——" On that word a hard sob came into her throat. She could think no more. She rode on, with her head bent down, while her misery rolled over her, flood upon flood, beating her down, drowning her.

In the evening, goading her exhausted self-control, she faced Grainger at the camp table, and listened to his hunting tales, and asked him sympathetic questions about his people. And he, to take advantage of so rare an opportunity, allowed himself to be gloomy. He grumbled about an uncle who grudged him an allowance, and wanted him to leave the Army, and a sister who was pretty and selfish, and would not stay at home and

look after his mother. Then, as the stars came out in throngs, there was even talk of one, Sheila, but she was poor, and, after all, " You've got to face facts—that's no sort of good in the Army."

Rhona wanted to say : " You love her. And nothing divides you but money. Go on your knees and thank God ; love is the one treasure the world holds for us. It is joy and health and life and immortality." But, aloud, she said :

" I shouldn't let anything stand in your way if you really care for her. If necessary, give up the Army, but don't give her up. I give you that advice from the very bottom of my heart. Believe me, I know."

He looked at her and thought of Cavell, and she knew what he was thinking, and knew also that he had not been sincere, but had squandered her sympathy. She got up at once and went to her tent.

Then the hurt feeling died away. It was her fault. He had only asked a little and she had given too much. It had been her fault all along that she had condemned these men. After all, they were only children, for all their uniforms and their responsible work. Children strayed from home into strange and lonely places. If she had been more than a child herself she would have understood, and have helped them by understanding ; already a little wisdom had come, bringing with it a little humility.

When a moon-ray came through the door and drew a silver triangle along her bed, she got up and looked out. The camp was very still, except for the camels snuffling and grumbling in their sleep. Beyond the fire a sentry stood, rifle in hand. Rhona looked up and paid allegiance to the African night, and, looking down, caught her breath at a thing that never failed to startle and haunt her—the sand in the moonlight. It was shining like water, but without the movement of water : it lay amongst the sprinkled shadows of the thorns like ice. It is the light of a moon that does not bring any thought of peace or rest, but stares naked from the sky at the thousandfold activity that goes on in its shadows. It makes the night beautiful and cruel, as the day is hideous and cruel.

" Yet," thought Rhona, vainly trying to stare back at the moon, " I am not sorry I came. If I could have chosen, knowing all that would happen, I could not have come ; yet I am glad that I came, not knowing. The only way to endure this place is to be like the natives and the animals, just live and fight and eat and die. It is a stupid cruelty to throw people like myself

and Blaker and Rankin here. Yet, for myself, I would not have it otherwise. At least I have lived and I have loved. I have ridden here as far as human adventure can reach. I have known the furthest range of joy and sorrow that can be touched. And I take away with me his love where Africa can never spoil it."

Grainger planned the trek badly. They had a night at Adadleh according to scheme, but they failed to reach Sheikh in the evening, as he intended. They camped just south of it, and rode in a short distance early in the morning. Rhona was not tired, but her will-power was exhausted. It was well, she thought, that by one act she had set things going as they were, so that she was carried forward without volition. She need struggle no more. Grainger would deliver her at Sheikh, someone else would dispatch her to Berbera. The Secretary would embark her upon the boat. Dane, thank God! thank God! was at Zeila, or on the way there.

When Grainger came galloping up and pointed to a large wart-hog going at an ugly canter across the track, Rhona waved him angrily away, headless of his generous offer of the first shot. She turned her face away as the report rang out, and when they brought the pathetic pig-like creature and shewed its hideous head, tusked and gnarled like bark, the tears came into her eyes in a sudden foolish way. Grainger was mystified and fell back, poring over his prey in delight. Ahead, the country opened, sloping down and clear of trees. The half-dozen dots that were Sheikh could be seen lying in their crumple, and, two miles beyond, the line of the escarpment jagged against the maritime plain. Soon they were right down in this area with its European symbols—bungalows, store-houses, the Governor's tennis-court, sunk deep out of the rush of the winds. Here was the Governor's Sudanese orderly, pointing out the marks of the raiders, and offering the Governor's empty house to the Memsahib by the Governor's orders. Soon Rhona was in an inner room which was empty and battered, but clean, while her servant bestowed her things about it, and she waited impatiently while he fixed the camp-bed. She sank down upon it, head upon hands, glad because she was too tired of feeling to feel any more.

From the front of the house, the veranda or the drawing-room came men's voices, Grainger's rather nasal and loud, and another voice, the Sudanese orderly. Why did they go on talking out there? Was some of the equipment lost? The other voice grew more distinct. Surely the orderly did not speak like that. It was not the orderly. If she had not known it was

impossible, she might have imagined something familiar. . . . She stood up suddenly.

Someone said :

" All right, Grainger, you go across. I think you'll find the stores untouched."

Slowly, pausing twice to lean against the wall, Rhona found her way down the passage into the drawing-room. There was no one there, but just as she crossed the room a man swung out of the veranda, and stood still, blocking the doorway and looking at her. It was Dane.

XXX

INSTINCTIVELY, almost before she understood the way in which he stood looking at her, Rhona stepped back, as if to escape. In the same way he put both his hands out, gripping the doorway, as though to cut off retreat. Rhona could not speak; she was shaking from head to foot.

Dane, watching her terror, and how she shrank from him, nodded, as if confirming an opinion, and looked behind him. The only moving figures in the wide view were those of Grainger riding across the hollow to the store-houses and the Sudanese orderly following him. The little ravaged station was as empty as a cemetery. With a sudden change he relaxed, dropped his arms and came into the room.

"You see," he explained, "I decided to come by Sheikh, because the Governor has been changing his mind every day, and I thought I'd get into touch with him here again before going off to Zeila. And I was delayed here by his orders, settling up compensation with some akils about the looting by the Dolbahanta. So your letter, instead of going to Berbera and on by sea to Zeila, caught me half an hour before I left here.

"But you need not look frightened. It's true Grainger is rushing off after some kudu, but I shall be busy all day and Peterson will be here for you this evening."

"But, Dane, what is it? It's my letter. You haven't understood."

"I think I have," he replied.

Silenced, she tried to appeal to him with her eyes. It was like throwing paper darts at a man in armour. The room which held them both with this silence between them seemed to suffocate her. She went out on to the veranda. After a moment he followed her and spoke from behind with a kind of gentleness unfamiliar to her.

"I want you to understand that I blame myself more than you for this mistake. I suppose it has all come of my being

such a fool about women. You see, I have been the most complete fool that ever lived. All we went through together has been to me something quite different from what it has been to you."

"Dane," she turned to him, with her hands out, "for God's sake let me explain!"

"*That's* what I can't understand," he replied, "that you should want to talk about it."

"But I do and I will."

"Then on your head be it, and remember I was willing to accept your decision and go without a word. Can't you see there are some things beyond explanation. When you've made a promise on which a man's life depends—You think it's only women who give. It isn't. I gave you my whole manhood. I can't take it back. It's irrevocable."

She felt for his hand, tried to take it, then dropped it. He explained patiently, as if to a child.

"No, Rhona, you don't understand. You've done what you wanted, and it's something that can't be touched by love-making or weeping, any more than by explanations."

She looked up, searching his face. More deeply burned by the sun than she had ever seen him, there were shadows in his cheeks and beneath his eyes, and each line on his face that meant hardness or fatigue had been cut a little more deeply. It was as if she were a stranger; his look made her such. But when this unnatural barrier should be broken down, as after the exposure and strain he had endured it must break, what other look would come into his eyes? She knew herself helpless and in danger, without knowing what action to expect of him. In sudden terror at being alone with him, she looked up and down the plain, searching, praying, that someone would come.

An oppressive silence fell upon them. The whole reach of the hills and the valley which swept away from the veranda seemed held by a double spell, their silence and the on-coming midday heat. Rhona could feel the blood beating in her heart and ears, and a voice saying "It's impossible; it is not happening. It's a frightful dream, and you will wake up." She looked up and saw his face, and knew it was real. He was gazing across the valley and his eyes, which were abstracted, narrowed and followed some moving object. He drew in his lips until they were as straight as a line. Rhona turned and followed his glance. A brown speck was moving down the hollow, then up straight towards the Governor's house. It was Grainger.

"Fate's on your side," Dane said, as though he had understood her thoughts, and they both watched the approaching horseman. He broke in upon their intense solitude with the noise and snorting of his pony and his high-pitched explanations.

"It's all right; they never got into the store-houses. Good business, that!"

"I thought you were going on. Why did you come back?" asked Dane.

"Well, look here, it's jolly decent of you, Dane, but you must be in just as much of a hurry to push off as I am. And I know Peterson will be here this evening to escort Mrs. Cavell. I could easily wait till then. That is, if you'll have me, Mrs. Cavell?"

He turned to her with a laugh and a bow.

"Well?" said Dane.

But at Grainger's coming and while they had been speaking, some revelation had been made to Rhona. She acted without hesitation, and in a moment it was done. Grainger had received his orders, the good-bye had been spoken and she was alone in the inner room.

Coward that she had been to think she could escape from Dane by the chance return of a stranger, and utterly blind to imagine that the rest of life could be built upon such an escape! She had thought that she could order the life of a man like Dane, solve the whole problem of their lives by a single act that only flight could make possible. Yet she had wanted to do right; wanted it with all her heart. Was that not enough? Was there a duty to be wise also?

She knelt beside the bed. She had not prayed much since Blaker's death. She did not pray now. She tried to put herself in harmony with whatever spirit of good might stoop to her cry. She willed to empty herself of all the mean or foolish ideas that belonged to the level of her work-a-day life, and thus purified, to wait in the stillness, that, if there were a God, He might put into her what she could not make for herself. Some act was needed higher than she had conceived. It was not enough to save one's honour as she had done; not even enough to make what seemed the utmost sacrifice. Something had been killed in Dane which must be brought to life. Better fail in that attempt than cherish the barren victories she had won. The idea came to her slowly, like a muffled shape approaching the light. She cried out at it in horror at first. She must abandon the beliefs and training of a life before she could think this a

spirit sent from God. She could not believe it until she remembered that it was Dane's soul, not her own, that she was to try and save. So a point might be reached in human relations when the life of soul and body must be laid down for another. As the thought passed into her she sank lower and lower against the bed, as if it weighed her down to the floor.

. . . . .

She found Dane on the veranda where she had left him and made her announcement quickly and clearly.

"Although I broke my word I did try to do right, Dane. But now right seems to have no meaning unless you join with me in doing it. So I give myself entirely into your hands. Whatever you decide I will do; if you wish it, before I go, I will ride out with you this afternoon to the top of those lonely crags above the maritime plain. Only I want you to understand this—it's no longer a question of love. I don't know whether I do love you or not."

Dane thought for a long time, and if, for one moment of rebellion against her fate, Rhona thought her offer itself had been enough he soon destroyed that hope.

"Very well, we'll do *that*," he said, clearly referring to the last part of her speech. Then, getting up, he went on: "We've plenty of time. We're only half through the morning yet. Go in and have a good rest and I'll see some food is sent in to you."

They rode out from the station in the early afternoon, when all the shadows had shrunk to nothing and the buckles on their harness burned the hand that touched them, as if they were red hot. Straight in front of them, a mile or more away, was the edge of the escarpment, but Dane turned diagonally westward to where the rim of rock piled higher and higher, until it reached a stark terrace, far above the line of vegetation.

They rode hard and all the way uphill. At first they cantered up a long incline, wind-swept and open, but bearing grass, thatched as sparsely as the hair on a camel's back. But soon the rock came biting through the earth in knife-like ridges; great boulders and multitudes of smaller stones, which had rolled down from the escarpment, littered the slope. Dane picked his way amongst them with little care. There was no track. Rhona had never ridden harder in her life, had not thought it possible to ride so hard. Her pony, a bright bay she had never seen before, was streaked with sweat and trembling. It's unshod feet grew tender on the stony ground. Rhona kept him up with heel and crop, following Dane, slithering, clambering,

wheeling, checking and turning as only a Somali pony can. Sheikh had vanished behind a heave of the plain: in front and above them the escarpment leaned up against the sky. Soon the last aloe and wind-torn bush was left behind, and there was nothing but the rock. Here, where pitch-black shadows showed a hole or a deep cleft, the leopards lived, and here, before a chain of boulders which Dane had somehow pierced, Rhona stopped.

When Dane, fifty yards ahead, turned and saw her there, he came back. With some difficulty he tethered the ponies, while Rhona climbed on alone up the height. Looking up suddenly, she found herself close on the brink. She cowered back, clutching at the rock behind. Surely this was the roof of the world. The escarpment was like a cliff, but never cliff stood so high as this, falling sheer to its base amongst the foot-hills, which eddied round it, as if they were no more than the froth of a long, calm sea.

She crouched down, pressing against the rock until it grazed her cheek and knuckles, while all the rest of the world went reeling round her. No human thing could throw itself over into an abyss so awful, so unimaginable as that. They said you lost consciousness as you fell, but that might not be true. How could they know? There was a limit to the things of which humanity was capable. That height was like some horror in a child's dream—some elemental, infinite terror before which the mind snapped like an overstrained thong. Turning her back to it, stooping as low as she could, and touching the ground all the time with her hand, she made her way round the summit and stopped in a little nest amongst the rocks, which shut out that aching fall to the desert. Here the escarpment had cracked open and a hundred feet below was a shelf, where a few tags of bush clung between the boulders. That would do. She marked the very stone from which she must step.

This death was not beyond imagination, not beyond achievement. Yet it was death, and her young body recoiled, her flesh writhing, as if every nerve and muscle twisted away from the place of its doom. Terror of death overwhelmed her, beating her down upon the ground, roaring in her ears, blinding, strangling her. It was impossible. The body could not destroy itself, it mutinied against the will. The will was mad that said honour was dearer than life: there was nothing in the world that counted except life—sweet, strong life, radiant with opportunity, loving swift movement and the sunlight. How would she go through with it—the effort of the will, the moment poised on the edge, the long, long fall and the battering on senseless stones, on trees like forks, until this dear, beautiful body was a thing

to be shuddered at, broken and torn, lying far below on the shelf like a strip of blood-stained rag.

There was the sound of Dane, kicking amongst the rocks, looking for her, and now he was outlined against the sky on the summit. He saw her, and coming, sat down twenty yards away. He looked out over the plains, pushing his helmet back with the remembered gesture.

The wildness of terror left Rhona. She stood up. The wind, racing, unbroken, across many hundreds of miles of sea and land, struck her breast-high, tugging her silk shirt, flattening it against her skin, until every curve of shoulder and breast stood clear. She unknotted the brown tie that seemed to be tightening round her throat and it was whipped out of her fingers and over the rocks behind.

Dane looked down into the little nest amongst the boulders. He jumped up and ran down to her, no longer rigid, but ablaze with some passion she did not understand.

He seized her arms and found her passive in his grip. Half-comprehending, he took her face, turned it up, gazed close, learning what words could never have made him believe again.

"Rhona——" he could not go on, but it was a question.

She nodded, her eyes steadily on his. "But," she made a gesture towards the precipice, "I meant to do that; I could not have gone on living."

He turned away and, sitting down upon a rock, buried his face in his hands.

There, crouched together as it were on the roof of the world, with the winds rushing and shouting amongst the rocks, the two wrestled with their fate.

It was a long time before he could speak. He stayed motionless, with his head bowed low in his hands, while the storm in him raged and died down. She sat at his feet, able at first to think of nothing but that she was not to die. At last she felt his hand groping, and she took it and held it against her breast. Thus linked, they stayed, wondering at the misery they had inflicted upon each other. Overwhelmed by shame, he could not meet her eyes. He began talking brokenly; then more clearly.

"How could I doubt you, loving you as I did? I don't know. It is all so new to me, this miracle we call love, this glory, this agony. I have been through a great deal this last week, but night and day I told myself that soon it would be over; soon I should possess you and hold you for all the rest of my life

Last night, when I read your letter, I was nearly mad. You should not have written as you did. Need I tell you all I thought. It was myself I cursed rather than you." He looked at her. "How I have made you suffer! Oh, my dear, we've been like children playing with fire; we didn't understand. As for you, I could strike you when I think how you gave your dear self up into the hands of the brute beast that I was."

"There was nothing left for me to do."

"How can I trust you away from me into the world with a code like that, you dear and beautiful child. No, you are not a child; you have become a woman since I knew you. How can I make it up to you? I would willingly die for you, but you have worse things in store for me than that. Well, what are you going to do with me, woman? Not leave me?"

Rhona pressed his hand strongly against herself as if to give him courage. She had never seen a man broken like this, making no attempt to hide it, laying aside, for a moment, his manhood. There had always been something generous and protecting in her love for him, ready, waiting for his need. Now at this moment of unbearable emotion she saw that it was not his strength that could carry them through. The responsibility steadied her. Her body ceased trembling; her mind cleared. She lifted the hand in hers to her lips, then tossed it back, smiling at him, as she tried to catch the fair strands of hair the wind was snatching from beneath her helmet. Then, having very deliberately settled herself in some comfort upon the stones, she began to answer him.

She told him of the journey she had made since they separated, and of the longer journey of her spirit. She made him look at his own success, greater than anything they had hoped for. She made him look at his future. Then, as if suddenly wise beyond her years, she spoke of the shame and scandal he was preparing to undertake, of the harsh judgment that would be passed to cloud his resignation and his new career.

"What could I do for you to make up? Drug you with happiness for a year or two. I daren't face it. I've learned what I pray you will never learn, what I think is the saddest thing in the world—how love can die."

But this he would not have.

"I can't listen to you if you have to argue with lies. That's not good enough for us. You know that I should always love you, whatever happened. Look at me, Rhona!" She looked at him, steadily.

"Yes," she said, "I do believe that. I'm glad I can. But

it makes no difference ; it's this country, Dane." She made a great circle with her arm towards the plain, lying like a map beneath them, and to the plateau tilting up to the ridge. " It's your country. It's in your bones and your blood. I think it's because you can do for it what no other man can do. You understand its people—don't pretend to me that for all their treachery, you don't love them like your own children. You are a first-glass administrator. You can fight for this country ; but that's not all. You can water it and plant it. That's why it has your allegiance, an allegiance you can never take back."

" Rhona, something of this is true. But, even so, haven't I done my share ? I've put Page and Cavell out of action, and if Chard comes back, as he surely will, if only to straighten things up, the battle is won."

" Is the battle ever won ? Do you remember, Dane, how we talked at Hargeisa ? You told me that the Empire was changing and our whole conception of the task our race has to accomplish. I believe in you, Dane. I believe that it would not be a small thing to take you away from the Service. I should always feel that I'd been like a traitor to my own country. We have a family tradition about the Services, and I know something of them—the men at home, the men here. They play the game as they've learned it, and they play it pretty well or pretty badly. But something more is needed now, and that something only men like you, who are not cut to a pattern, can give. To you power is a trust, not a career. You'll go on to bigger and bigger things. I know you're great. There isn't a man in this country fit to lace your boots. I'm not talking in this way because I love you, but because I've become very wise these days, and a sure instinct tells me that it is true."

" You fight hard, don't you, to break our hearts ? Have we no right to happiness ? "

" Happiness ! " echoed Rhona, her eyes ranging over the scarred plains below. Kneeling, she crossed her elbows upon his knees, and looked up very seriously into his face. " Dane, I've discovered something. I don't think you and I could ever be really happy that way. I wish to God we could. We are both under a curse ; we can't help it. Has happiness ever been enough for you ? Were you looking for happiness when you left the Army—went out to lonely stations—worked amongst the *miskeens*—defied your chiefs—dug gardens in the sand—sold your boots and saddle . . ." Her voice broke on this and she clung a moment to his knees, whispering, " God ! how I love you ! " Looking up, she went on, " Don't you see it is

not I who am imposing this terrible thing upon us? It is you—it is this merciless self-sacrificing spirit of yours. You have power to do great work, and if that power is not used, you will perish. You may not even know what had happened to you, but I shall know, and it will be I who will have destroyed you."

Rhona's head was tilted back, with the tears running down her cheeks unheeded, as she looked up at him and beyond him, as to some light that drew her. Her face was like the face of a white flower, which, after the rain has drenched it, slowly lifts itself up and looks towards the sky. Dane, loving and reverencing her so that he could not touch her.

"Must the decision be now? You are carried away—you are in a state of exaltation. Here, on these heights, it is as though we were no longer on the earth. I feel it too. But, afterwards, when we get back into the work-a-day world—Oh, Rhona, I love you, I love you! I shall never be able to let you go."

Dane moved away from her and covered his face, shutting out the sight of her and the terrible height that was beginning to madden him, the sky and the rocks and the ceaseless storming of the winds. The agony of what they were doing bowed him down. If only such a mortal wound to the spirit could destroy the body! But the body lived on stupidly, working, eating, sleeping, for the long imprisoning of the crippled spirit.

"Not to see you any more! To know that the same world holds us—the same little country when I come home—yet that we must always be alone. Supposing you are wrong, that there is no God, no good, no reward in the end for all this self-inflicted misery? We have not thought enough. Rhona, Rhona, at least let me see you once when I come home."

"No." Rhona cried out as if she were nearing the end of her strength. "I'm not made of iron. I could not bear it. It must be all or nothing."

Her tone was a cry for help, and he answered it.

"As soon as we get back," he said, and she was startled at the sudden calmness of his voice, "and I hand you over to Peterson——"

"I spend my life being handed about," she commented below her breath.

"—I set out for Bulhar."

"No, you're tired."

"I want movement. Besides, I have to go. I shall say good-bye to you, my dear—my lover. I know you are right, divinely right. I can do the work, and better work still. As

for this country—I can't talk about it. You know me better than myself. But, Rhona, I cannot do this because I am not as strong as you, unless you give me one eleventh-hour chance to change my mind. If, when I have ridden all night to Bulhar and faced it all out, I find that I cannot do it, that I have not the courage to live without you, I shall send you a message. There is a wireless station there. Any message will do—you will understand. It will come just before you sail. But, if it is the end, there will be no message. I shall ride out along the shore that night, just when you will be drawing away from the coast. And that is how I mean it to be, because I mean to be worthy of you."

Their exhausted minds were grateful for even this much of decision. Rhona's determination was to hold at arm's length the thought of the suffering to come and to achieve successfully the immediate task. She knew there would be terrible moments before they parted, but now, just as the sun began to look under their helmets with the promise of the evening, came an interval of peace. Sitting under the shelter of the rocks they talked, knowing it might be their last talk, smiling, laughing, storing up the memory of each other's face and words. They talked of Blaker and of what Dane might do to mark the place where he was buried. They talked of Rankin; of the possibility of Chard's and Sheringham's return and of the future of the country. She watched him, proud of spirit and sick at heart. But soon Dane turned to her with a smile and that loving kindness in his eyes which she prized so much.

"No, dearest woman," he said, taking both her hands, "I know what you are thinking. Never think it. My work and you are one now. If I go on working, it is because you have wished it. You have given me what I never had or hoped to have—appreciation and understanding. I shall live to justify your faith in me.

"I've sometimes had a curious feeling that nothing good in this country counted for anything; that in this land, where men and animals live by their appetites alone, it was futile to try and uphold a different standard. The effort would be lost like a drop of water in the desert; that just as my plant lived in the sand only by ceaseless artificial watering and the desert could wipe out all trace in a week, so the attempt to establish any justice or righteousness in our administration was just as hopeless, leaving just as little result. All the years I have worked here that dreadful conviction has had to be fought, coming upon me at intervals. That, I think, was why I hated Cavell so

because, with his policy and his contempt for mine, he was the very incarnation of that idea. I think, if it had not been for you, after the destruction of the dams, I should have lost all heart. But you were there—Cavell's wife! This last success is your success. I did my best to spoil it. You've saved it by —simply by being what you are."

Then Rhona, in the tangle through which she had been forcing herself blindly, saw light. She understood how human beings are allowed to help each other through love. Their love no longer seemed a tragic accident or a jest on the part of some cynical deity. She saw its meaning and offered thanks to that instinct that had driven her blindly forward to an end she could now see was good.

She stood up and went to the edge of the ridge. She thought, "God help us both to live up to this moment."

Dane called her back.

"Come over to me, and let me hold you against my heart for a little while."

So, lying in each other's arms, two small ephemeral creatures, on that huge stage reared up between the desert and the sun for the play of the elements, with the winds shouting and talking amongst rocks almost as old as time, they felt, through all their misery, something of the peace that comes with a supreme achievement of the human spirit.

XXXI

Down the escarpment and on to the maritime desert, with a wind like the blast from a furnace door lifting the sand and driving it stinging across the level.

Into Berbera, still and indifferent as a grave-yard.

"Is it possible to do a thing like this? Are human beings capable of it? Is there no one to help us—no one even to know what is happening to us?"

There is the ship in the harbour and the dhows and the hawks and the naked children, just as when she came. How long ago was that? The time when she did not know him, had not even heard his name.

There is a wireless station at Bulhar; telegrams can be sent as well as received.

The Doctor was at her side now, gripping her hand. She was in his house, barricaded three sides against the hot storm. He was putting his coarse warm hand on her wrist.

"My dear, I understand a little. He was raving at one time, you see, and I sat with him. I've liked you ever since you stood by young Blaker. You've had a rough time, and if a sodden old sinner of a P.M.O. may so far presume—my blessing go with you."

So Rankin must die, and she must talk to him and let him talk, and pretend not to know, because he did not want sympathy.

There was Rankin, propped upon pillows, his hair very black and his eyes very big.

"It's little Rhona," he said. "So sorry, Doctor."

"What are you sorry for?"

"That you can't stay with us."

She was alone with him, staring at him, trying to fit him and his death into the scheme of things. But what business could death and Rankin have together?

"Captain Rankin——"

"Rankin, please. Oh, I know your little ways! May I not rank in with the elect?" He copied her grimace. "Frightful, wasn't it? But so spontaneous."

But how silly to make puns when you were dying! She frowned.

He was talking about the foot of the hill at Hargeisa. But why talk about that now? "Because you told me everything then, and are going to tell me everything now."

She told him, kneeling by the bed, with a hot, wasted hand locked in one of hers, and her voice getting lower and her head drooping. It was like talking to a woman. "And so, you see, you were all wrong about the mountains."

"I was right." His feverish eyes were closed to hers. "Only I could not see that your mountains were very high and that at the top of the highest was a lonely, stony little place, where nothing grows, but which you had to reach in the end before you could be happy."

"Happy!"

"Yes. And I wonder whether some day you'll find there is another summit on your mountain, a little higher, a little stonier."

What did he mean by that? Things which she would not hear, a plan at which she would have cried out in horror, but for the hush of the sick-room.

They said good-bye. "I've changed my mind about your Empire. I think it will last now. Rhona, always be proud of yourself. What's that passage? 'And the land had rest forty years.' Due to a woman. Another Judith, only—*autres temps, autres mœurs*. And it was not even your own country."

"It is my country." Then, because his eyes were so bright and his voice so tired, she kissed him and found her way out.

Still an hour before she need go to the boat. She would not send a message. Not after what Rankin had said. (Why must he die? Oh, the stupid cruelty of life!) But he might send a message—he must. Feeling noble was not enough to last a lifetime—a lifetime without Dane. She had begun it and she knew. He would know by now.

"Good-bye, Mr. Forster. Good-bye, Mrs. Colver. I suppose there's been no telegram for me? Oh no—nothing important. An hour before the boat sails? Oh, thank you, Mr. Forster, if you could just send across, if it comes."

She was on the ship—the same captain, the same little corner astern. The hold is packed with sheep. They are hot and panting. A few people, who care nothing for her, are standing on the Shaab pier. There is no one coming down the track with a message.

She must take farewell of Somaliland. It is a royal moment to depart. The sun is going down, a hemisphere of flame, into the sea, and across the calm water floods a legion of colours, green and scarlet pools flowing into each other, pale lakes of melon yellow, islands of amethyst—all the world's colours come together to compensate in a moment of beauty for the monotone of the day.

There is no one on the pier now, no one coming down the track. The last rim of the sun has dipped below the horizon and the bright colours are trailing after him. The sea becomes dark blue, and the white of the town changes: mosque and square houses glimmering until the meanness and glare of the day are forgotten, and mystery comes to them. Far away, beyond the desert, the hills still catch the afterglow, and they seem like hills of glass, in which pale fires are burning.

But while Rhona closes her eyes and opens them, the fires have gone. The water becomes a hard glass green. The earliest stars struggle with the afterglow and slowly prevail.

She can no longer see the track. That in-lighted blue of the night, the master-colour of the East, has triumphed, and the stars throng about it in clouds and companies. A green and a red light in the harbour throw two glittering roads past the ship.

There is movement and shouting. The ship trembles. They are about to sail. Oh, the cruelty of ignorant men and inanimate things! Can they take her away? If she tells them that she was mad and that now she is sane—if she tells them that her courage is broken? If she tells them that she loves, and that they are strangling her and driving some sharp weapon into her side?

He has sent no message. He is lost to her. With the certainty comes a sudden quietness as when a wild struggle ends suddenly in a death. It is not only quietness that comes to her, but light. It is a grey light but enough to make clear to her the country across which she will inevitably journey. What will be is with her now, and it is as Rankin foretold. She will not find it in her to turn her back upon the man whom she can help and whom she once loved. That much she knows now, and knows, too, that she cannot see the manner of her service, nor

weigh all the years of it. She will go on living, breathing and eating, laughing sometimes, not always remembering. Nor will her heart always be sorrowful with its secret ; it is enough once in a life to have achieved the immortal thing, to have been upon the mountains ; no sojourning, however long it seems, upon the plains, can take that away, for there time rules, but the other is of the stuff of eternity.

He has sent no message. He must be there, many miles up that dim coast, where the waves are breaking quietly in a foam of phosphorus. His horse will be in the water's edge, dripping jewels from its hoofs. Now she can see him, sitting quite still in his saddle, gazing out to sea, his face set. She can see him and love him. Something that is not misery comes to her. Is it what Rankin calls happiness ? It is too soon yet for her to know that.

THE END

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MAJOR DANE'S GARDEN

M. F. PERHAM